## The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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## A Courageous Thought

Mr Saifur Rahman has suggested that party politics should go into a kind of hibernation for three years allowing the nation to address its big challenges with a united will. Mr Rahman is a courageous man to come up with such an advice at a time when politics seem wholly occupied with party interests. Mr Rahman's is a voice of sanity in an overpacked asylum and needs to be complimented duly and supported effectively.

It is a courageous counsel for this is what Sheikh Hasina, though phased in a confusing way, has been canvassing for over the last two months. Mr Rat man's idea seeks to ensure that we achieve a cons ensus on policies which don't reap a harvest for any party — and the only beneficiary should be the whole nation. As much more of a technocrat than a politician he knows about national challenges Deing not amenable to any party government's going it alone. Better still, he cares about these challenges. How can his sentiments be reciprocated in a manner that can lay the foundation of all-party action on a national front? BNP secretary-general Mannan Bhuiyan had said they were ready to co-operate with the government on a number of national issues and had asked for a list of issues the Movernment was interested in. These are expressions manifesting a positive approach to problems that can help the nation eminently at this moment. Opportunities opened up by our independence and driven beyond the horizon by subsequent developments, are knocking at our doors as very palpable possibilities. Making the most of these would call for concerted national action. Anything less may reduce this pregnant time into sterility.

Mr Saifur Rahman, however, has a problem. How far can he go to translate into reality what he believes to be the right antidote to our national malaise?

Let us hope his courageous pronouncement sows a seed in that still unfriendly soil of our politics. The nation will perhaps overcome the present difficulties and the politics of mean stratagems will recede into bad dreams well past. His voice will sure have made its contribution to that happy possibility.

### Danger Underneath

We are a late corner to the realisation that thousands in Southern Bangladesh have been ingesting sub-soil water contaminated by a lethal arsenic dose. With only a tip of the iceberg showing after a belated detection of the high poison level in the blood stream of drinkers or users of shallow tubewell water we have a full-size public health disaster on our hands.

The appraisal of the menacing situation by the public health authority has been both slow and inadequate. Despite the uneducated panic calls from the people of Fakirhat in Bagerhat district and of the adjoining Khulna district for quite some time in the past it was only after July last that the water sample began to be tested at all by any expert. It was at this point in time that the sole dependence upon the Atomic Energy Commission in Dhaka for any water-test could be gotten over as the WHO was kind enough to provide some equipment to the Khulna Public Health Department for a decentral sed testing. This brings up our galling unpreparedness in terms of basic equipment to face up to any unfolding health menace.

But in the case of the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal arsenic pollution in water saw a hue and cry raised both among the media as well as in the government circles. The Anandabazar Patrika is said to have reported that sub-soil water in seven districts of West Bengal was exposed to arsenic-laden rocks in the region. Since two WHO experts are probing arsenic contamination across the border on the West Bengal side, their findings could prove useful to Bangladesh as well.

It is essential now to determine the exact magnitude of arsenic pollution of our sub-soil water. As it is, sample-tests of water from only 14 shallow tubewells out of as many as 2228 there in Bagerhat area, helped depict that dreadful picture. Heaven knows, were we able to put all the shallow tubewells to test what would have come off it!

We suggest a three-pronged strategy: extend the required medical help to the affected people immediately, find out if there is any established pollution pattern, checkmate the contamination with expert advice and support drawn from the repository of world knowledge on the subject.

#### **Hospital Diet**

Dietary allocation for each patient in a government-run hospital has been raised from Tk 22 to Tk 30. Though the increase entailed scraping from other areas of the shoe-string health budget and signifies a glimmer of new sensitivity towards nutritional requirement of a patient it hasn't quite scaled the wall of mere symbolism.

The other way of looking at it would be that in a resource-constrained context even a slight increase in basic allocation enhances the value for money obliging the spender to use it that much better for the patient's well-being.

We are keeping our fingers crossed on Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf's assurance that the raised allocation would be duly followed up by monitoring to ensure the quality of diets served to patients. The hint of cynicism is bred by the predictable customary seriousness that hospital administrations are apy to show now and then, with the dusts settling, allow indulgence to the machinations of the thugs and touts to skim the butter off the added allocation.

The authorities are toying with the idea of appointing plain-clothes minders at the public hospitals to keep the touts off-limits. While their main job would be saving patients from harassment, we believe such surveillance could have an effect of cleansing the inner stable. At any rate, nothing can substitute internal inspection.

# More than a Gesture, Hopefully

When Prime Minister broke all rules of protocol and the restricting concerns of her security, and walked into the Press Club cafeteria to talk to the journalists (belonging to the other BFUJ) who staged a black flag demonstration earlier, we had a sample of old time politics of wit, decency, respect for the opponent and a desire to talk to all concerned, even to the bitterest of critics.

rare instance of political suavity. Coming in the midst's of a sad parliamentary session in which we saw too much time and energy being wasted in denigrating and even insulting political opponents, the example set by Sheikh Hasina makes us feel that all is not lost yet.

Here we are getting all ex-

Here we are getting all excited about something which should be a normal way of doing things. An elected Prime Minister, a veteran political figure who has become the country's chief executive from peoples support is expected to behave in a certain way. She is expected to be tolerant, open to different and differing views and most importantly, to take criticism in a most open, constructive and non-confrontational manner.

But unfortunately it is the contrary practice that we have come to consider as the norm. Regrettably, we have grown used to seeing politicians getting at each other's throat. They never seem to have a good word about the other. When somebody expresses a dissenting view, the tendency has been to denounce that person and try to question his or her credibility, and even integrity.

On Saturday last Sheikh Hasina set a contrary and refreshing example. We are referring to the Prime Minister's clever and wise move to directly

NOTHER round of cam-

pus violence and the su-

I I flerers are students who

Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina as the opposition leader

got kudos in October 1991 when

she suspended the activities of

the Bangladesh Chattra League

(BCL) in a dramatic step to end

campus violence. "I suspended

the activities of the Chattra

League in Dhaka University to

restore calm as well as to ensure

restoration of proper academic

atmosphere there," she told this

writer. She had added that it

would remain suspended as

long as normalcy did not return

the Awami League since inde-

battle between BCL and the

Jatiyatabadi Chattra Dal (JCD)

less child (tokai) killed. JCD is

Minister Nazmul Huda, now a

lawmaker of the opposition

Bangladesh Nationalist, Party

(BNP), in brief comments on

Sheikh Hasina's decision said

it was "good step," but accused

the Awami League of triggering

former prime minister and cur-

rent parliamentary opposition

leader Begum Khaleda Zia twice

convened "All-party" talks to

end campus violence, the out-

come appeared positive with all

In November same year.

The former Information

left three students and a home

pendence and came after a gun-

It was the first such move by

"gurus" with guns.

on the campus

BNP's student wing.

the violence.

talk to the dissenting journalists at the Press Club premises. What she did was a democratic and courteous way of conducting dialogue with political or thideological opponents. But because ours is a political culture of always trying to out-force the opponent and not of out-wit-

when Prime Minister broke all rules of protocol and the restricting concerns of her security, and walked into the Press Club cafeteria to talk to the journalists (belonging to the other BFUJ) who staged a black flag demonstration earlier, we had a sample of old time politics of wit, decency, respect for the opponent and a desire to talk to all concerned, even to

Normally what we would have had as a response by a sitting government big-shot to any black flag demonstration would have been castigation of the people who did it with, most probably, strident speeches and personal attacks, including references to how the said persons were beneficiaries of one gov-

Surprising everybody, Sheikh Hasina avoided that tablish some sort of regular

path confronted her critics and asked them as to why they had demonstrated and what their grievances were. She even asked them to submit a memorandum containing their demands and invited them to talk with her.

By all standards of Bangladeshi politics her behaviour was exceptional. The reason that we have decided to write about this event is because we think that we would experi-

d mechanism to exchange views d on issues where differences are widest?

Why are we insisting that the Treasury bench should make the first move? For the simple reason that the responsibility of those in power is always far higher than those who are out of it. When Khaleda Zia was in power we always insisted she should be the one to make the first move. We urged her to

## The Third View

#### by Mahfuz Anam

ence a sea change in our politics if such behaviour could be transferred inside the parliament or into our day to day pol-

Imagine that during the recesses in our parliament session dramatic initiatives are
taken to bring our Prime
Minister and the Leader of the
Opposition to a face to face dialogue, with or without aides. If
that be too much to expect, then
can the two Deputy Leaders es-

visit the house of the Leader of the Opposition, especially after the latter started boycotting the parliament. All our urgings went in vain. It is for history to judge as to whether she has been well served by her attitude of aloofness and pride, or whether

she would have been better

The same question is with us now. We address ourselves to the new Prime Minister. The example she gave on Saturday encourages us to repeat our sug-

served by being more humble.

gestion. Since both leaders are frequently present inside the House it may not be too difficult to organise something. Experience shows that magnanimity never harms, even when there is risk of a political snub. When the mood in the country is for peace and understanding, unreasonable position taken by any national leader will not go down very well with the peo-

Time may be ripe for a similar gesture by the PM to her political counterparts in BNP, as the one she made to the black flag waving journalists. Need for such an initiative appears more urgent especially in view of the language and content of the debates that we saw during the budget session. As much of it was telecast we got a clear idea what our lawmakers did or said in the name of parliamentary debate. Much of the venom came from political rivalry that had gone far beyond normal practice of parliamentary politics. A sure way of arresting the slide in the quality of parliamentary debate would be a dramatic gesture by the PM of the type that we mentioned

Politics is about dialogue and public support. Our's is perhaps the only country in the world where the two most important leaders are not even in the talking terms. However one may put it, it is a shame.

We do not expect anything in the above lines to happen before the by-elections. But once those are over, can we expect a more realistic approach to politics by the two leading political parties? Here we would like to draw the attention of what former finance minister Saifur Rahman said yesterday in an interview with the Bhorer Kagoj. His call for a moratorium on partisan activities by the four leading political parties (see editorial). including his own, is indeed bold. It is doubtful whether he will be able to carry his own party to this view. Nevertheless he deserves all our praise for being able to rise above his own party perspective in making his suggestion.

Whether the PM makes any dramatic gesture, or whether the ruling party and the opposition BNP opts for a more cooperative political relationship, the bottom line is that something in that direction will have to be done. We would like to underscore just one point, politics as we are seeing, is ominous. It has to stop, if we are to give any credible impression of genuinely wanting to move the country forward.

## Campus Violence — a Shame for Politicians

IN FOOL'S PARADISE?

by Nadeem Qadir

Does history in its wrong perspective have to repeat itself in Bangladesh — a nation born with the blood of three million martyrs? It is a nation where Noor Hossain and some others sacrificed their blood and future as they cried out "democracy, democracy please."

but a growing sentiment is either student politics should be banned or steps taken that only genuine students can enter the campus, with only peaceful protests that effect their lives.

But not those who serve their dents to give up Terrorism," to

The meeting called on students to give up Terrorism." to resist terrorist elements who should not be given shelter by any quarter and that the government would remain "neutral" in handling campus situation.

Between March and October, 1991, some 200 educational institutions were closed in nationwide violence, mainly involving JCD and BCL, with some reports of involvement of Islami Chattra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat.

Following the meetings. Awami League MP Sajeda Chowdhury said, "the talks were very warm and friendly, but it depends on the sincere action of the government, as it has the power to stop campus violence.

Mr. Huda said. "the government is definitely sincere and that is why it had convened the meeting." adding that in democracy both the government and the opposition groups have equal roles in dealing with ma jor national issues. "We all belong to this country and putting the responsibility in our shoulders only will not get us anywhere ... Ultimately everyone will have the take blame" if things did not work out.

Kazi Zafar Ahmed, as the country's prime minister from the Jatiya Party, informed the Parliament in January 1990 that about 200 students lost

their lives in political violence over the two previous years and called for national unity. He also said 15,000 students were injured in similar incidents since independence. Former president Hussain Muhammad Ershad disbanded his Jatiya Party's student wing in 1986. "Our hearts ache and heads droop with shame when we look at the recent developments on the Dhaka University campus.

Mr. Ahmad added.
Once again, with a new government in power, student violence is escalating with tension

still gripping Dhaka University

and the government under crit-

icism for NOT BEING NEUTRAL

in its police action there to ar-

Hasina has repeatedly said that

arrest culprits even if they be-

longed to her party, but why

this criticism? Her Telecom-

munications Minister Mo-

hammad Nasim reportedly

said," "We want to end this ter-

rorism at any cost.. . If need be

the student wings of all politi-

cal parties should sit the Home

Minister and prepare list of ter-

rorist in their respective sides."

two sides. One, admission that

political parties harbour goons

and two, good intention is there

no guideline who will take the

Mr. Nasim's comment has

Prime Minister Sheikh

rest "terrorists.

initiative to start the talks. One other point is that our political leadership never speak of disbanding or at least temporarily suspending student politics.

However, a young colleague disagreed on banning student politics. He said the root of terrorism is the factor that should be handled and students must have a voice in national issues. "Violent politics or armed

"Violent politics or armed cadres are the results of extortion as politicians fail to provide cash and permit some to earn their own way, what ever that might be, leading to battles

for supremacy which has links

to extortion from construction

or from shopowners near the

yesteryears, they will find

words and actions have so far

remained unchanged, but only

have switched sides. Does his-

tory in its wrong perspective

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Bangladesh — a nation born

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ture as they cried out "democ-

Will Sheikh Hasina and Be-

gum Zia honour them today and

disband their student fronts?

Will they honour them today by

handing over "armed cadres" to

racy, democracy please."

If readers turn pages of the

campus," he said.

police for stern action? Will they hold the Holy Quran and say "Bangladesh is free from student violence?" The answer by all chance

will frustrate us as this appeal
will go unheeded, but the prime
terminister has to take the first
ald step as she is running the
country. She has to take her opes, ponent into confidence by arranging a face-to-face meeting
instead of not being in talking

It is clear that the Awami and the BNP hold the future key of this country, but political considerations and poor advice take over practical or realistic approach to issues.

The BNP Secretary General

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and former finance minister Saifur Rahman has finally extended hands of cooperation to the government. Let no one miss or spoil this opportunity. Some people believe that teachers have a role to play by being a political and giving up the panels which they represent in their respective body elections. For politicians they blame irresponsible comments that help spark violence just for political gains, paying little heed to national interest.

Some also believe that "
anti-Bangladesh forces" become
active whenever some good decisions are taken by the main
parties with the objective of
destroying the country's future

— students.

The Daily Star and other newspapers reported recently that JCD beat up students sup-

porting BCL in one dormitory and then came the episode of taking control by the BCL of residential halls, heating up the campus.

Since 1990, the Dhaka University Central Students Union elections have not been held possibly in fear of a BLOOD-BATH, but if the major parties nominate students instead of armed cadres, then the university's politics will definitely change for good.

The violence has also contributed to brain-drain and Bangladesh is losing its best hands for the development of a foreign land, mostly the West.

According to a 1991 study of Dhaka University's Institute of Statistical Research and Learning, 37 per cent of students said the political parties were the main force behind campus violence, while 40 per cent blamed teachers, which they repeatedly

As a former student of the Dhaka University and as a citizen of Bangladesh I can only hope that our politicians will come to their good senses and save this nation from destruction.

Please free us from this cycle of violence, crude and senseless politics just for the sake of state power. Keep your pledges so that the new generation also learn to speak the truth.

I would like to repeat a comment several days ago by an Indian child artist on Star Movies: "Be practical, not political" in major national issues, please

The writer is Special Correspondent with Agence France-Presse (AFP). Dhaka

### 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.

#### BTV's present programme schedule

Sir, During the regime of former president Ershad and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, BTV was called the 'Shaheb-Bibi-Golam' box and the 'Bibi-Golam' box respectively. because it was alleged that television then worked as a propaganda machine for the ruling party, while ignoring the opposition parties. To ensure neutrality and improve the quality of programmes, it was agreed that BTV will be turned into an autonomous body which the previous BNP government failed to do.

This issue was among the main campaign agenda of the Awami League and they promised to better the existing situation. At present, I do not wish to criticise the overall performance of BTV, but only draw attention to one important aspect. BTV at present does not seem to maintain any programme schedule. Nobody knows when a programme scheduled to start at nine o'clock - will actually begin. Programmes which should end before the ten o'clock news drag on and on towards midnight. Then, if two programmes are scheduled to be shown after the ten o'clock news, it is quite impossible to know which one of

them will be telecast. Do the BTV authorities take us for idiots who remain glued to their TV sets as long as they are on air? Introducing the telecasts of the parliament sessions has made the situation worse. I do not think that BTV has ever stooped so low as it has in recent times, not even during Ershad's regime. Such anarchy cannot and should not be tolerated in a civilised nation aspiring to improve its lot. I therefore urge the BTV authorities to prepare a proper programme schedule and abide by it strictly.

Wastur Rahman 38, Shantinagar Dhaka-1217

#### Removal of extra

bumper from vehicles Sir, I fully agree with the comments of Mr Mustag Ahmed, FCA and professor Nurul Hoque on the recent directives of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) concerning removal of extra bumpers from motor vehicles as published in The Daily Star on 20-8-96. I have such a bumper with my personal car too. At least three times I could save my car's original bumper and headlights because of this very useful extra bumper. The reckless drivers of ever-increasing rickshaws and baby-taxies always try to overtake each other and thus come very close to the passing vehicles. In such activities quite often they entangle their mud-

guards and bodies with those of the vehicles and cause serious damages to them. I am sure our DMP are fully aware of this situation. I would like to salute the person who invented this most useful gadget and request the authority to encourage the use of such extra bumpers to minimise motor damages and save our valuable foreign currencies being spent on import of spare parts. A single notice will suffice to ensure prominent display of numberplates from within the extra bumpers if in any case any obstruction to the number plates has been caused by such bumpers. If sincerely desired the relevant Motor Vehicles Act

In this connection I would like to draw the kind attention of the traffic authority to the numerous violations of traffic rules that are constantly occurring on the roads of our cities. Many rickshaws having same numbers are always plying on. They never ply on in lines. The baby-taxies simply don't care. They are constantly medling amongst all the traffic in their own ways creating a lot of accidents. Many vehicles including even some of DMPs have been constantly emitting poisonous gases. Buses, trucks, big coaches etc., are blowing their hydraulic

can be amended.

horns at their peak and damaging our ear drums. All these are happening right before the nose of our traffic police. Are these not negligence of their duties? I shall therefore request the authority to give more attention to these problems rather than wasting time on issues which are helping the public.

Dr M Myser Ali B-5, Road-23, Banani Dhaka-1213

#### God save us

Sir, We have gone through a news item wherein your good self has asked for opinion on improvement of law and order situation. We want to make the following suggestions to you in this regard:

A special team of officers

A special team of officers drawn from the police intelligence and army intelligence should be constituted in every district of the country under whom plain clothed persons should be allowed to go about in every volatile locality of each city. These persons can easily find out from a corner pan shop or the area grocery shop as to who are the mischief mongers. These plain clothed persons in turn, will immediately react to their calls. Their bosses in turn, will be having upto date mobile cars authority to tackle this situation. This team should not be under any police station because the officers of the police station are alleged to be involved with these terrorists who are the officers.

The district administration should give public notices in all newspapers to furnish names of mastans and toll collectors in each and every locality of the respective areas. The task force should then start their own discrete investigations into these names.

Representatives of Chamber of Commerce and leading citizens should be involved in task force of every district whose meeting must be held once every month. This task force can be called Citizen + Police Liaison Committee.

Under no circumstances.

political interference should be allowed in the Police department and if this can be sustained, then country will record sure progress. As an industrialist, if I catch a mastan red handed, I have to pay the police to have the mastan arrested only to find that he has been released the very next day on bail and

again threatening me.

The writer is an industrialist and in his area (in Chittagong), the mastans are highly active and even though the police knows about these mastans, they are not taking any action whatsoever. In areas like Stadium Road and Jamal Khan lane at Chittagong, people cannot go alone on a rickshaw or walking after 10 pm with the threat of his/her losing watches, jewellery, etc. It would be worthwhile to have male/female police go as decoys and trap these minor street urchins red handed and thus save the innocent citizens

from this nightmare.

I sincerely hope and believe that if the top bosses are honest and God fearing and are really sincere, then there is no reason whey law and order situation cannot improve. It is a known fact that every other day trucks come to Fringhee Bazaar and Enayat Bazaar in Chittagong carrying smuggled goods. Don't you think the Commissioner of Police in Chittagong knows this. GOD SAVE US.

A Concerned Citizen.

#### Appeal to Education Minister

Sir, At least for 5 to 6 years the job of a primary school teacher has, it is learnt, been made a non-transferable one beyond the local limit of his or her home district. This rule has created hindrances and inconvenience in leading their family life peacefully by the husband and wife, each being primary school teacher and belonging to separate home-districts.

The primary teachers are too poor to bear the expenses of scattered family - with the wife along with the children in a place and the husband in another. It is not a case only among the couples who are both teachers rather also to a female primary school teacher married either to a businessman of another district or to a service holder whose job is by nature non-transferable. Suppose, a husband is a lecturer in a private college whose job is by nature non-transferable or a husband who works in an NGO which has no branch in the district where his wife is a pri-

Thus if the job of a primary school teacher remains stagnant in his or her own district, how is it possible to have a marital life with his or her husband? Moreover, it increases gaps between them and weaken their tie. It is mentionable here that, in other government services the husband and wife enjoy privileges to be transferred, as near as possible, to each other from different districts.

In this perspective, it is nec-

essary to make the job of a primary school teacher transferable. Such transfers may be made at the option of a teacher whose spouse holds a non-transferable service or business beyond his or her own district. So, on behalf of the suffering couples, I earnestly request to the Education Minister to kindly make the said job a transferable one.

Md Al Mamun 347, Zahurul Haq Hall. Dhaka University, Dhaka-1000

#### Task Force or Dead Force?

Sir, The Home Ministry has formed a Task Force in August to nab the terrorists, miscreants etc., in a bid to improve the law and order situation in the country. The convenor of this Task Force is supposed to be an additional secretary of the Home Ministry. This Task Force has two telephones and a fax number and members of the public have been asked to contact these numbers for passing on their suggestions and opinion for improvement of law and order.

improvement of law and order. It can be interpreted that the law and order situation is so bad that the government had to form a Task Force. Be as it may, we were very enthusiastic about it and sent two fax messages on behalf of the residents of the locality bringing to the notice of the Task Force the existence of a drug-den and the resultant nuisance that normally accompany such clandestine business As law-abiding, tax-paying citizens of this country, we appealed to the convenor of the Task force to look into the matter and expected redress.

But to our disappointment, about three weeks have passed by and absolutely nothing has been done so for. The thriving drug business continues as the law-abiding people of the locality groans. Is the Home Ministry really interested in cleaning up the mess or the Task Force is another propaganda?

Suruj Mian Elephant Road, Dhaka-1205

#### Garbage disposal cans and other sorrows

Sir, I am sure you will agree with me in expressing my deep concern for the 'sorry' state of some streets of Dhaka city (apparently those which are not used by the VIPs of our country). Despite repeated publications (of news, complaints, pictures) on this topic, the authorities concerned are opting to remain silent.

ontinues, I am sure anyone can foresee a disastrous flood problem in some parts of the capital city itself in the not-too-distant future.

Moreover, open manholes, ditches and dug-out holes 'hid-den' under rainwater can turn out to be extremely hazardous for pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and rickshaw-pullers.

To aggravate the situation there is the problem of 'garbage' lying about despite the existence of huge garbage disposal bins or cans in some focal points of the city (they are very eye-catching being yellow in colour and big in size)! We fail to see these 'bins' in the roads of Jigatola, Rayerbazar, Moham madpur and Lalmatia (to name a few non-VIP roads). Mixed with stagnant rain-water, these garbage virtually turn the atmosphere into a 'hazardous zone'. But it seems that the citydwellers now consider this un hygienic air a part of their daily diet! For how long? We surely deserve a healthier, and fresher environment. I implore upon those concerned to do some thing in this regard immedi-

Farzana Yasmin Mannan House No. 27, Road No. 2 Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1205