

An Early Warning

We regard Wednesday's anarchy in front of the DSE building as a fortuitous but inevitable reminder of what needed to be done to streamline the stock market on a this-far-and-no-further premise.

Although some educational effort can help deflate the bloated public expectations of a continuing bonanza from the stock market, our firm belief is that if a system is in place even that detail will be automatically taken care of.

Let's face it — there is some opaqueness in the stock market operations, the self-defensive and buck-passing arguments on both sides notwithstanding.

We have three specific suggestions to make by way of ensuring transparency in the stock market operations. First of all, the felt-need of a Central Depository System has to be met without any further ado.

The modernisation process will operate a fillip if we can arrange cross-border trading through regular network displays of our stocks abroad.

The government, for its part, had better avoid ad-hoc measures that tended to breed a mercurial temper in the market.

Jail Reality

A report published in the yesterday's issue of the Daily Star gave the number of prisoners in the country to be 46,000, a figure that is twice the capacity of all the jails in Bangladesh.

But then this is only an outsider's view who is not touched by the trials and tribulations attached to the whole process of crime and punishment.

The real cause for concern is the apparent obliviousness of the authorities about the purpose of sending a criminal to the jail. Jail is a place where a man is sent to be reformed not to have the seeds of a premature death planted in him.

It is not merely a case of economic and spatial constraint. It is a matter of not being focused on the human and purposive element of the whole issue.

If there is some headway being registered on the plan to upgrade four district jails to central jails, there is also the reported uncertainty about when the relocation of the Dhaka Central Jail will take place.

Commendable

The sixteen-day stalemate at the Jahangirnagar University ended commendably last Wednesday with the feuding student factions reaching an agreement through the good offices of the authorities.

Such a demonstration of good sense by student bodies upholding political schools as different as chalk and cheese is rare though not unique. Not long ago, rival student factions at the Dhaka University had closed a deal affirming their commitments to ensure congenial atmosphere on the campus and also to all attempts of the authorities to maintain law and order by coming down heavily on the terrorists with the help of the law enforcing agency.

Sixteen-day is an awfully long time for any institution to remain inoperative in normal circumstances and that too an academia like JU once known for the regularity of its sessions and the idyllic atmosphere.

If reconciliatory initiatives are replicated by student leaders in other institutions tainted with violence, life on the campus will be education-friendly. Students should remember they are students not politicians first as the JU students seemed to have realised Wednesday.

Foreign Policy or Privileged Groups?

What we in Asia have to think is how long will we be petitioners in western courts and chancelleries? This story must now belong to the past. We cannot be playthings to others.

It is not even logical. Still political considerations have made some leading parties link India's reverse at the UN to foreign policy.

Politics has clouded the real judgment. Opposition leader Atal Behari Bajpayee was the first to throw the brick.

The waiting of the Congress leaders does not come as a surprise because they are wont to run any government which is not theirs.

the policy, which their leader, Jawahar Nehru, had initiated. And the oddest noise is that of former foreign service hands, who have got a chance as settle personal scores.

This is not the first time that India has failed to win a seat in the Security Council. During the hey days of Indira Gandhi, New Delhi suffered defeat. Even then, as it happened this time, many countries had promised to vote for India and had gone back on their word at the time of voting.

Foreign policy is nothing temporary or ad hoc. It has a trait of continuity, not adventurism. It may require at times fine tuning but not the acquiescence of instrument.

The contest at the UN reflected India's commitment to the policy that the world body should have a representative to voice grievances and aspirations of developing and underdeveloped nations.

But if joining issue with

America amounts to falling in defending foreign policy, New Delhi is at fault. What we in Asia have to think is how long will we be petitioners in western courts and chancelleries?

It is unfortunate that the

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Third World countries should barter their principles for a price. They still behave like client states. Had I not, as is their number, decided to stand on their own feet and to cooperate with one another to get their representative, the result would have been different not only at the UN but all over the world.

Washington is angry with New Delhi. It wanted to show that those who try to cross the line would be punished. The lonely battle of New Delhi on the CTBT front was not the America's liking.

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In fact, the developed countries are going in their way and replacing colonialism with economic imperialism. What is being sought to be done at Singapore is more sinister than that America has engineered at the UN. Through the WTO

Hurdles in the Middle East Peace Process

Following French President's visit to Palestine, the US warned Europe not to meddle in negotiations between Israel and Palestinians, saying it would be unwise to try to create a "mini United Nations" in the Middle East. A S M Nurunnabi analyses

THE current phase of the 'peace process', started in Madrid a few years ago, received a decisive boost in Oslo and culminated in the now famous handshake between PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel.

After decades of war and hostility, the realisation dawned on the parties concerned that the only viable option in the Middle East lay in the principle of land for peace which had earlier formed the basis of Camp David accord with Saudi Arabia and from Jordan to Morocco.

relations between Palestinians and Israel, has not so far worked in the manner as expected on account of certain new contingencies.

The difference in the present case is that a step-by-step approach which envisaged the progressive transition from Autonomy to Statehood has been complicated by the Israeli settlements on Palestine territory. Since 1994, Israel has withdrawn its troops from most of the Gaza Strip and about one-quarter of West Bank.

Israel has delayed re-deployment of its troops from four-fifths from the West Bank town of Hebron as agreed under the previous Labour-led government, citing security concerns for 450 settlers who live among Hebron's about 100,000 Palestinians.

The United States continued to step up pressure on Israel and the Palestinians to wrap up a deal on Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank town of Hebron. After his election victory, President Bill Clinton called for a rapid Israeli-Palestinian accord on Hebron. Speaking at his first news conference after his re-election, President Clinton said: 'The first and most important thing we can do is to nail the agreement on Hebron. If we can clear the Hebron hurdle, it has much emotional significance to both sides as well as practical significance. I believe that will open the door to go on

moderate 100,000 more Jewish settlers. The proposed settlement expansion has not yet been approved by Netanyahu though he seemed to back it in principle. The Palestinians view the proposed expansion programme as a violation of 1993 autonomy accord with Israel.

and fulfill all the other challenges that are before us.' An important event in the ME peace scenario was the visit of Jacques Chirac, the French President, to the Palestine region, who called for a stronger European role in Middle East peace process. While addressing the Palestinian legislature, President Chirac said that he was greatly honoured to be the first head of state to be invited to speak before the first assembly elected by the Palestinian people on its own land.

What Nehru said nearly 50 years ago is still relevant. In this atomic age Asia will have to function effectively in the maintenance of peace. Indeed there can be no peace unless Asia plays her part. There is today conflict in many countries, and all of us in Asia are full of our own troubles.

India has a difficult role to play. But it is a role which some country must play because after the end of the Cold War the developed countries cannot create another kind of hegemony which will keep weak and poor under their thumb.

India has vainly argued that the insistence of the West to have a free movement of goods and capital will be disadvantageous for the Third World countries. If the world is free, then why not free migration of labour from developing and underdeveloped countries to the West?

Whether it is a gathering or a meeting place we follow our own way of thinking/Whenever we find the lessening of light, we light a candle then and there!

nation, that might is not right. It conveys that the Third World countries cannot be used as pawns by others.

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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.

For a good Constitution

Sir, For a good, durable constitution, the political scientists prescribe the vital requisites viz. written, flexibility, rigidity, unitary, federal, presidential, parliamentary, multi-party system, two-party system etc.

Sovereignty is now accepted as something belonging only to the people, not to the government. So in the USA, it is the convention that to be eligible, a presidential candidate not only has to be born on the soil of the USA, but his three past consecutive generations had to be born and pass their livelihood on the US soil.

Under these circumstances the only way left for the association was to avail the help and cooperation of the newspapers. More than a hundred write-ups of the association appeared in the dailies and weeklies. But no one cared. It appeared that the Ministries concerned — Labour and Manpower, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Industries, Commerce, Cooperative, Social Welfare etc. — had no public relations departments.

Within a span of less than 100 days of taking over the charge, the present government declared the voting right of the expatriates, which was not done in 20 years.

To give emphasis on the issue of rehabilitation of the bulk of returnees and the expected returns, besides some other important points, like — establishment of expatriate-repatriates bank and insurance company, abandoned house to be utilised as transit camps for stop-gap use of the expatriates on their in-coming/out-going movements, appropriate utilisation of the valuable experience of the repatriates earned from most modern working atmosphere abroad, in nation-building activities, building educational institutions for their children etc.

Royal Bengal Tigers: A prey to human vice

Sir, At Mirpur Zoo in Dhaka four Royal Bengal Tigers had died and five more fell seriously ill, who may die at any moment. This mysterious deaths started a few days ago of which the Zoo officials are not able to give any satisfactory answer. It is suspected that some unscrupulous persons behind this heinous act, which resulted in the untimely and agonising deaths of the innocent animals. We are shocked by this inhumanity. What could be more deplorable and shameful than this?

Human beings not only keep these animals as prisoners for their pleasure and delight, but stoop so low that they do not hesitate to end the lives of the captive for their self purpose. This moral degradation is really frightening.

We demand proper investigation and persons responsible of this grave offence. If found guilty, they must be punished accordingly. The relevant authority must make sure that no such incident ever happen again.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong.

Ice started melting

Sir, In its very infancy the "Expatriate-repatriate Welfare Association" confronted with repression from the then government instead of getting any support. Then came the democratic government. They posed in such a way that to them wage earners became mere foreign exchange-earning machines.

The association had been attempting to draw the attention of the former government through its repeated write-ups in the newspapers, particularly in connection with exercising the right of casting vote by the expatriates, which remained totally unresponded in action and words.

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S A Hossain 85, Elephart Road, Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka.

The 25th anniversary of Independence

Sir, The 25th anniversary of our victory in the Liberation War is knocking at the door. Much has been said as to what we should have achieved, and what else we should have done during the last 25 years.

Looking back, as part from our struggle for independence, when we try to count the losses this country had suffered as a result of the war, we meet it either in terms of loss of property and infrastructure as in crores of Taka, or in terms of the loss of lives. This latter sacrifice, we have honoured as shaheeds or martyrs. But do we remember those who had not died, but had been injured in the war? We now recognise them as merely disabled people.

For the martyrs, we have built a smriti shoukha at Savar, which probably is the worst looked-after national mausoleum of its kind in the world. It is polished and cleaned only when the war-related days are here. But rest of the time, you will find all sorts of debris floating around, and a few young people climbing (or trying to climb) the structure. This is a place where a visitor should find the peace to remember his fellow brothers who had laid down their lives for a cause. Definitely this is not a place which would remind one of his or her prehistoric ancestors.

But what about the disabled? A few years back we merely changed their title from 'wounded' to 'disabled'. 'Disabled' is not 'injured-in-action'. But is that sufficient? In these 25 years, the past government had declared a National Policy on Disability, but that was all. There has not been any legislation or any other measure for its implementation as yet. The government has declared a building code, but till today, a wheelchair user does not have free access to the government offices. Fortunately, (or rather, unfortunately) we do not have a single

Parliamentarian who needs the use of a wheelchair, because the JS is not accessible!

Will it not be most unfortunate, if a wheelchair user (carrying a disability as a result of the Liberation War) wishes to visit the clean, tidy and polished smriti shoukha on this 25th anniversary of our independence, (and believe me, there will be a bigger crowd of visitors this year) he will painfully find that he is not yet independent himself? Because, no one thought of building slopes or placing ramps along the walkways that would allow his free mobility across the beautifully-built stairs.

After all these years, on the eve of the 25th anniversary, would the government kindly give a thought on this?

Dr Nafeesur Rahman Disability & AIDS Coordination Unit ACTIONAID Bangladesh Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

The Zoo story sounds weird

Sir, Thanks to The Daily Star for the providing news on what's happening at the Zoo. Seven priceless animals have been lost within a span of one week. The loss of the nearly-extinct species of jungle cat is indeed tragic and hardly leaves any dent in the minds of the citizens that is something gravely wrong with the Zoo unless the Zoo authorities and the government wake up the situation some more animals may die.

The total lack of interest and neglect the Zoo authorities are showing, is indeed a shame for us. If the Zoo authorities are unable to find out the reasons of the deaths, we might as well seek assistance from other countries and save the animals. After the sad death of about 2,500 munia birds at the Zoo and the subsequent news in the newspapers, it was expected that the Zoo authorities and the government would take appropriate steps, but nothing happened. See, now the damage is even more colossal! What are the responsible people doing?

L A Ahmed 24, Shantinagar Dhaka.

OPINION The Consensus Concert

A Husnain

The main political party in power is propagating, in good faith, a concept or philosophy of political consensus at the national level; and that, too, in seeming hurry, immediately after coming into power after two decades.

It is a tough exercise, mental and physical — something like joining together the pieces of a broken glass, and expecting the joints to be invisible. Time is a great healer; but these are great times to hurry and catch up. On what? It will be tougher when the concept becomes an operation. It is easier to provoke than to persuade. Cooperation cannot be commissioned.

The exercise has been launched right after assuming power, and is being pursued with earnest resolve, visible above the surface, but 'invisible' if beneath. The net has been opened wide, and generously. Still, there are no signs that a political 'Internet' will emerge soon (it took years for the computer Internet to click).

The two major parties are dominating the local political scene, creating a bipolar stance of the supporters in the national effort. The tugging of the forces are not in the same direction, therefore the journey towards the national goal is being slowed down. The purpose may be to have the diverging and conflicting pulls coalesced together. Perhaps a command performance is not expected. Variety is the spice of life — at least in the Parliament.

There are two preconditions to turn the concept into reality: the scattered lines of forces have to change direction (as in a magnetic effect); and the right type of cement has to be found for the bond to hold together. So

far, the search has been elusive. In fact, the two polarities are drifting apart, instead of converging. To achieve the process, more tools are needed than in politics. Our problem is not new: we subconsciously tend to depend too much on 'politics' — because the politicians have so far failed to provide the right type of leadership.

The political culture is yet immature in the nation, due to factors clear enough to the students of history. The centrifugal force of statesmanship is missing, to change the bipolar 'charismatic' pairs. Such a situation of stalemate will continue till unity and consensus at the top is achieved.

How long this impasse, bipartisanship will continue to divide the nation, even after more than two decades? This is a vital question for the reflection by all of us, when the conditions are right for the accelerated progress in a country transitioning from the status of CIT (country in transition) to NIC (in the near future). Ironically, are we becoming our own worst enemy? Investment and projects can be arranged, technically speaking, but who or what can make the heart move?

Politics may be likened to a game of chess, but the chess board has confined boundaries in a horizontal plane in two dimensions. The flight upwards is not possible. This third dimension is missing in our politics. The spirit has to soar, but the wings are clipped. We have to get rid of the dead-weight of gut complexes to become lighter; to be outbound. Don't we feel cribbed, caged, and confined?