

## Danger from Within

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has directed words to the MPs of her party seeking their 'whole-hearted cooperation' in the government's efforts to improve law and order which has somewhat gotten scratched in the face lately. Thanks to some avoidable intra-party discordance coming into the open, the credit that must go to the government for an overall brightening of the situation, seems a bit diluted.

The scars etched by some regrettable differences between heavyweights in localised contexts and the internecine conflicts in the BCL occasionally surfacing as armed rows, have willy-nilly raised a question-mark on the basics of governance. These need to be firmed up and set in order if we are to see any durable improvement in the law and order. The Prime Minister's hands need to be fully strengthened in the discharge of her crucial responsibilities as the mandated architect of good governance.

Let's say once again that the Tangail incident has tested the government's will in such a way that it should serve as a reference-point to fight off vested interests within the AL. Chittagong is also a case in point where in inner conflict bristles with unhealthy words against administrative assertiveness. The factionalisation in the BCL is giving rise to occasional violence within that student party, let alone its being arrayed against the JCD all over the country. And the height of aberration the other day was when peace on campus came as a result of an agreement between the BCL and JCD cadres over toll collection pertaining to construction tenders. *Mastani* is taking on newer royal features such as asking for 150 dishes of *Iftar* from a eating place within the campus free of cost, for one.

Therefore, the PM's exhortation upon her party MPs should not be construed as a routine, untar-geted one meant to be lost in the ether. The MPs should wield their natural clout on the party activists at every level. It is the danger from within they must beware of. The Prime Minister needs all the support she can get from her own party and only a fully disciplined party can give her that kind of a boost.

## Shibir's Threat

Teachers of Rajshahi University came under Chhatra Shibir's attack for the second time in a week. As many as 15 teachers were reportedly injured. They became the eye-sore of the Shibir on two counts: a) they wanted the Jamaat-leaning Vice Chancellor's dismissal; and b) they won the recently-held election of the Rajshahi University Teachers' Association (RUTA). The victory of the progressive forces, has been deemed as a challenge to the stranglehold of Shibir in that university.

Similar incidents had happened on Chittagong University campus, another bastion of Shibir. Everywhere the same ploy of intimidation and ruthlessness has been applied to establish control.

The All-Party Students' Union has rightly condemned the attack on teachers. We do not know if the VC, as alleged by the All-Party Students' Union, had in any way instigated Shibir move to cling to his post. But some of his remarks were indicative of his almost condoning the attack.

Now that teachers, students, administrative officers, and employees — except the supporters of Jamaat — have gone on an indefinite strike demanding the VC's removal, a highly tense situation is prevailing on the campus. Shibir activists have threatened the striking teachers with 'disrobing' them if they failed to take classes immediately. Their capacity to commit barbarity was amply proved on the Chittagong University campus. They are capable of doing the same on RU campus because they have long captured the halls and established their unchallenged supremacy there.

The removal of the VC is a question much bigger than the threat of disrobing. Civility demands that such an attempt will be resisted at any cost. The government will fail in its duty if the Shibir can carry out its threat. There should be an adequate number of law enforcers on the RU campus with specific instructions that any attempt to humiliate teachers will be dealt with an iron hand.

## A Case for the Crew

The SOS call sent from cargo ship Jalco Sea-2 was a ploy adopted by the captain as part of an international racket. There was an attempt by the captain to prove that the ship sank in the Atlantic with all its crew. So, the name of the vessel was changed into MV Jahan under the instructions of its Bangladeshi owners in Singapore. This is the sum and substance of the latest information, as reported by a Bangla daily, received in Dhaka about the cargo ship that was supposed to have sunk in the Atlantic.

Now families of the 24 Bangladeshi crew who had little knowledge of the racketeering were worried about the fate of their men stranded in Tema port, Ghana. The captain, a Ghanaian and chief engineer, a Burmese, have been arrested there. We do not as yet know if there is any legal case against the crew from Bangladesh. That they have not been arrested shows the crew are not suspects. If they have no part in the complicity, then they have every right to return home at the earliest. In this matter the government must play an active role.

We urge the government to look into the racket, for it should not be very difficult to track down the various agencies involved in the matter, whose names have appeared in the report. Apart from bringing bad name to the country, such greedy businessmen become a cause for innocent people's sufferings. So let the racketeers be brought to justice. We want to see no repetition of such an incident in future.

# Some Thoughts on Civil-Military Relations

by Matur Rahman

REGARDING the very sensitive issue of civil-military relations and its present and future implication for Bangladesh, there exist concerns of different dimensions and magnitude in all circles including the government and the opposition. The question of the army's role in politics creeps in almost in all their political discussions. Because we have seen that not only during the military rule, even the elected government of BNP had tried to use the army in their partisan interest.

The newly-elected Awami League government too has been trying in some way to be popular with the army. The question is: why this hyper-attention? To me, the answer is, it is the result of political considerations mixed with a sense of fear. The reason for this may be ascribed to the fact that the army has played a direct role in the ups and downs of the political events of Bangladesh during last two decades. Someone can say that in the present world, after the end of the cold war era, the possibility of the army's interference in politics is no more there.

However, this reasoning is not enough for the political leaders to trust on and feel comfortable. The army is a highly disciplined, armed and powerful institution. They can have influence upon events and developments, if they want to. They can, even if in a limited way, influence the political developments of the country. We think, the fear psychosis emanating from this potential power of the army is still working. The sense of fear must be removed. Now it has become imperative for us to build our civil-military relations up on the basis of mutual trust.

In the beginning I would like to mention that starting from my college days in 1962 to 1990 I was actively associated with student politics and political movements. From the early months of 1962 movements

civil society. In this effort they had succeeded to some extent. However, throughout the whole period the civil society had taken a position opposed to the army rule and struggled for a democratic system. This position sometimes took the form of severe confrontations, and sometimes remained dormant. A major part of the whole period experienced military rule, and intermittent curfew. Political leaders and activists were arrested and tortured. The Press was gagged. Many activists sacrificed their lives in the struggle against the military rule. And in the process the anti-military view of the civil society became more stronger.

Coups and counter-coups were staged several times, military leaders were killed in rebellion within the army, hundreds of rank-and-file military personnel were sentenced to death in military trials in camera. All this had repercussions not only in the civil society, but also within the army. Moreover, the stories of corruption and debauchery of some military leaders became open. As a consequence, the sense of opposition to the military in different sections of the people and the society as a whole grew stronger. For all this, we can blame a section of the power-mongering high army officials. And, though not the army as a whole, a section of it of course, worked in cohort with the corrupt officials. They had associated themselves with the corrupt and conspiratorial politics of their bosses.

As a result, mistrust and fear gained ground in civil-military relations. The severe damage done to the civil-military relations and the division created during the period are still prevailing. It will take time to heal the wound, overcome the mistrust and division, and create a balanced relation between the army and civil society. To achieve this objective, well-

had tactfully used in this favour the failure of the political forces in running the government and also the institutional weakness of democratic rule.

In this context, it has to be said that the opportunists and reactionary sections of the politicians worked hand in gloves with the military leadership in their anti-constitutional activities. After the assumption of power by the military, they came forward to co-operate with the army and took part in plundering national wealth. And in this process a breed of politicians emerged who came to be termed as opportunists by any definition, and who are still active in politics.

## Civil-Military Relations Just after Independence

During the years immediately following the independence the country was going through a period of abnormality. In the aftermath of independence, the military rule, the general public we could not realise that the difference between the political leadership and the army had grown so fast and so deep. I can still remember that when any foreign diplomat enquired about the state of affairs of the army we enthusiastically said that everything was all right, that there was no problem, and the Bangali military leaders would never behave like the brutal Pakistani generals. However, though unbelievable it was, a section of the military staged the coup against the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975. Military rule was promulgated. And within three months we found the army taking full control of the country.

As a matter of fact, during the years immediately after the independence the issue of civil-military relations received little importance in the war-debated Bangladesh. The gen-

eral opinion was that the army would remain under the control of and act as directed by the political leadership, so to say the government. But the army had different aspirations; they aspired for greater budgetary allocations and other facilities and benefits. There were allegations that their demands were not being considered with due attention. The then political leadership failed to address the issue for various reasons. The seeds of division were sown the day when the army, developed in the process of our Liberation War of 1971, was merged with the Bengali army personnel repatriated from Pakistan (they were greater in number). The experience of those who directly took part in the Liberation War and that of the repatriated personnel gave birth to doubts and mistrust between them. It continued for quite a long period of time. It worked as a catalyst of many events within and outside the army. In my opinion, even after 25 years of liberation its remnants, though feeble, are still there within the army. And it is still a talked about topic outside the cantonment.

There happened another important event. In 1972, the then government established an armed agency in the name of "Jatiya Rakshi Bahini" to control the law and order situation, which was deteriorating fast. The army could not accept the presence and the activities of this agency. And who does not know that no army can tolerate the formation of any agency parallel to it!

Besides all these, the political-social situation of the period was very tense. The promulgation of presidential form of government, the formation of unitary political party, closure of almost all newspapers, and the high-handedness of the party in power and its affiliated bodies gave birth to adverse reaction among the general mass. The above mentioned measures of the government went against the ideas and emotions of the civil society. There were reactions within the army as well, against these measures. All these show that the civil-military relations during the reign of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not normal. The relation further deteriorated, and the background for confrontation started looming large.

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against the military rule began in the then East Pakistan. And this movement against direct and proxy military rule continued till 1990 with a brief pause of three years and a half just after the liberation of the country. It means that three decades of our life have been spent fighting against direct and proxy military rule, and for democracy. This is the experience of our lives and the lives of the generations following ours. It gave birth to a long-term suspicion about the army in our minds.

## The Legacy of the Past

The experience of the past reflects the multifaceted problems facing the civil-military relations. This is more so because the political force, i.e., the Awami League which was overthrown by the army, has returned to power after 21 years of struggle against the army and military rule, and through a general election held in June last year. And that is also why we are keen to see how the civil-military relations develop in the present situation. Our initial understanding of the process is that both the political party in power and the military are acting cautiously. And they are trying not to create any misunderstanding from either side.

We the people of Bangladesh have achieved our independence after a long struggle of 25 years against the oppression of the military and civil bureaucracy of Pakistan. And one of the major demands of that struggle was to establish a system of parliamentary democracy. Just after the Liberation War the parliamentary system of democracy was established; but only three years later, one-party autocratic rule was imposed in place of parliamentary system. A small group from within the army ousted the government which imposed the one-party rule in an armed massacre in 1975. Almost everyone in the army endorsed the results of either direct initiative or indirect manoeuvre of the army leadership. To be very specific, it can be said that the main goal and objective of the higher-ups of the army were to protect and promote the vested interest of the military in many ways and means. The military leaders also tried to get allies from different sections of the

meaning efforts are required from both the army and the government. In this regard, I think, the military, particularly its leadership, should have to be more cautious. They should prove by all their activities that in future the army will never associate itself with the politics of the country. I do not know whether it is possible, however I wish the army should try to exonerate itself by apologising to the people for its past deeds, such as violation of the constitution, assumption of power by illegal means, and for oppressing the people. What I actually mean to say is that the army should dissociate itself in clear terms from its past deeds of political usurpation and wrong-doings. The earlier the army does it, the better its image will be. And in the process the mistrust and fear of the political leadership and civil society as regards the army will be removed.

## Why the Aggravation in Relations?

The question is, why had the civil-military relations aggravated so much? Could it not have been checked? We must look back if we want to go deep into the problem. We know that the Bangladesh Army developed as an institution in British-Indian and Pakistani style. Not only that, they also maintained a negative attitude towards politics and politicians after the British-Indian and Pakistani army fashion. Moreover, in the process of armed struggle against the Pakistan occupation army the political thinking of the army started taking root, and they became interested even in political power. In those days, cross-current of thoughts prevailed among the high officials of the army.

There were in the army the supporters of the ideals of the then government as well as the adherents of the "revolutionary ideology". The ambitious power-mongers were there, as were the reactionary groups thriving on conspiracy. From this point of view, the army at that time was not at all united.

After the political change in 1975, the confrontation of different thoughts within the army intensified, and their adherents tried to defeat each other. And this had caused several ups and downs and unfortunate events occurred within the army.

In our understanding, the remnants of over-politicisation of the army at that time are still there. From the experience of the political developments of the last two decades of Bangladesh it can be said perhaps without ambiguity that the army for its own sectoral and partisan interest had interfered in politics time and again, grabbed power, and had taken recourse to any means to prolong it. The military leadership

amicable, but very argumentative). Both DCC and the government are competing for greater lapses!

A Husnain  
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**A real friend**

Sir, It is very enthusiastic for me that a female friend of mine regularly subscribes to my favourite newspaper — *The Daily Star*. And, whenever any of my letters get published in the paper, she also keeps the clipping and gives me one. Isn't it wonderful?

May God bless her.

Mostafa Sohel  
Banani, Dhaka-1213

## To the Editor

### Inefficiency contest!

Sir, On the second day of Ramadan, the price of meat in my area shot up to Tk 140/kg. Later I bought from my regular butcher at Tk 120, the same rate as before Ramadan. Why the authority announced fixed rates for meat/beef at Tk 100/60, when it cannot implement it? Simple press release is not administration. DCC's efficiency is not rising. The footpaths are not clear for the pedestrians; mosquitoes have invaded the Awami Leaguers in power; no metered taxis yet; and the drains are as clogged as ever.

The administrative jam is greater than the traffic jam! DCC is losing its authority also;

other private agencies are now issuing rickshaw/driving licences! What prevents us from issuing licences for freedom from the law?

I am not joking. Two *chanda-wallas* came from a madrasa, and disagreed with me that asking for donation (door-to-door) was against the law (recent government order), but claimed that use of force in such cases was unlawful! (One was a blind person, and the other a young man in his teens who is drop-out from class VII).

The regime's biggest problem is the erosion of respect for law and order. The above activists challenged me to call the police (they were polite and

## Another Potential Threat to Traffic

by ASM Nurunnabi

We all tend to brand the cycle rickshaws in the city as a villain in the story of horrendous traffic jams in city streets. This has given rise to arguments for and against the question of elimination of this predominant source of city's traffic congestion. We are not yet sure how this problem will be handled in future in the interest of the city's traffic management.

Lately this problem is being compounded by another undesirable development: the gradual emergence of rickshaw vans on city streets. Previously loaded with not much heavy weights and large volume used to be carried by push carts. Such push carts have always been a factor for traffic bottlenecks on city streets, particularly in the old part of the Dhaka city. But their number were far less compared to the present trend of steady proliferation of this contraption all over the city for carrying of goods of comparatively light weight. It is reported that the total number of cycle rickshaws in the city including those running without licence or fake licence is in the neighbourhood of a few lakhs. On the other hand, judging from the ways rickshaw vans are being increasingly used for manifold purposes, it seems that they enjoy no less popularity as a means of conveyance in emergencies such as hartals or for carrying patients to hospitals in the absence of ambulances.

As a result, their contribution to traffic stalemates in city streets has been steadily growing. An idea of their large numbers may be had, for example, from the sprawling open garages where such rickshaw vans are parked near Hatirpul road crossing, wholesale fish market adjacent to Sonargaon

Hotel and also in some busy commercial areas.

There has been no check on the growth of this type of conveyance. As a result, it is felt that rickshaw vans may turn out in the near future as a potential challenger to the supremacy of cycle rickshaws on city roads.

These rickshaw vans have many ramifications: some are converted into mobile carriages for sale of *chutpaty*, *fuchka*, peanuts, cut-pizzas, etc. Some are also used for hawking chickens, fish, vegetables, etc. from door to door. Some are even turned into mini vans for carrying children to schools.

From these manifold uses as convenient carriages and in the absence of suitable alternatives for such purposes, it seems that rickshaw vans have come to stay on city roads as long as cycle rickshaws hold sway in the same areas of operation. This portends a not so happy situation for the city's traffic controllers.

Another aspect of the operation of rickshaw vans is that the financial benefits derived by their operators are comparable to those derived by cycle rickshaw pullers. This is perhaps due to the reason that rickshaw van operators reap comparable financial returns by virtue of getting higher charges for their hire with fewer trips to places of their destination. In this light, there are reasons to believe that as commercial activities increase, requiring transport of goods in manageable volume and weight, there will be a corresponding increase in the demand for rickshaw vans to be put on roads, with consequences quite similar to those created by cycle rickshaws on city roads.



## Looking at Bangladesh

**Sooner or later, both the Awami League and the BNP will realise that the country needs more development, less politics. Polarisation on the basis of parties is understandable but polarisation in the economic field will be at the expense of Bangladesh.**

A top official in Dhaka well-known to the audience at a cultural meet, He recalls the Bangladesh liberation struggle and hails the leadership of the late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. But he forgets to address him as Bangabandhu. There is furor in the crowd, which demands an apology for 'insulting' Mujib. No explanations help him. He is swept aside.

Elsewhere, a sector commander of liberation days commits a similar mistake of not affixing the title of Bangabandhu with Mujib. He is hauled up and rebuked for his sacrilege but to no avail. Supporters of the ruling Awami League refuse to listen to his speech which, they feel, derogated Mujib from his exalted position.

Understandably, the pent up feelings against those who denied and denigrated the role of Mujib, father of the nation, had to find a vent. The rulers after his assassination had gone out of the way to erase his contribution. They rather had lionised the forces which were against the temper of independence that Mujib represented.

Awami League may make him a party leader instead of country's founder that he is.

There will always be people to defame founders of nations. For example, we have in India an egoist called by the name of Bal Thackeray, who trades in hatred and communalism. He recently dubbed Mahatma Gandhi's experiments with celibacy as 'a complete farce'. His effort was to justify allegation of an illicit relationship between Maharashtra deputy chief minister Gopinath Munde and a woman, Gandhi has not been affected, but Thackeray has evoked derision and ridicule.

However, Sheikh Hasina's sensitivity is not out of place. The BNP and its leader, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, refuse to give Mujib the respect and honour he deserves. The tragic part is that their opposition to him is in proportion to their hostility towards India.

The first statement Khaleda Zia, after submitting her resignation, made was that the Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty, nearly 25 years old, was a sign of slavery. An editor rightly pointed out why she did not say

Sheikh Hasina has made the difference in New Delhi's attitude. She has brought back the memory of Mujib's days. And she is correct in her attitude towards India. For example, she has denounced the India-Bangladesh treaty and stands by the demand for its abrogation. At the same time, she recalls the assistance that India gave Bangladesh in its liberation struggle. Prime Minister Deve Gowda has reciprocated the sentiment by visiting Bangladesh. But it would be wrong on the part of the BNP if it were to consider Deve Gowda's trip was only to boost Sheikh Hasina. It is a message of friendship. It was childish on the part of BNP to have organised its protest against the government on the eve of Deve Gowda's visit. India wants to befriend Bangladesh. For its domestic compulsions, the BNP should not oppose India for the sake of opposition.

Coming to domestic compulsions, the Awami League and the BNP, the two parties which have emerged, are at daggers drawn. The fallout of their hostility is low economic growth,

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

so while she was in power. Her entire posture is anti-India and her party has been plugging the same line. In fact, anti-India was their plank in the last elections which they lost.

The BNP's reaction to the Ganges water agreement betrays the same bias. It has denounced the agreement for political reasons. There are suspicions of a secret clause. BNP general secretary, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, gave out his party's intentions when he asked me at Dhaka why New Delhi did not enter into a treaty with Khaleda Zia. The simple reply is that the Congress government was against any agreement. The moment the non-Congress government assumed office, it initiated the process.

Mannan should recall that it was the BNP government, headed by Ziaur Rahman, with which the first agreement was signed in 1977. That was the Janata government. In fact, 1,000 cusecs of water was contracted over and above the agreement settled at the personal request of Ziaur Rahman. Khaleda Zia could have effected an agreement if she had not listened to her bureaucrats that India would give in if pressured. Sheikh Hasina got what she wanted because of her forthright attitude.

Yet, it cannot be denied that the assumption of power by

vast unemployment and brawls in the countryside. Investors are scared and donors unhappy. The two parties have to cooperate for the sake of their country's development.

Sooner or later, both the Awami League and the BNP will realise that the country needs more development, less politics. Polarisation on the basis of parties is understandable but polarisation in the economic field will be at the expense of Bangladesh. There has to be a pause in the petty fighting which goes on in the country all the time. The nation's interest has to have precedence over other considerations because it has waded a pool of blood to reach the place of pride.

The liberation war was not fought by the Mujibnagar elite alone. It was fought by the people of Bangladesh. They may now be labelled as the BNP or the Awami League. But while engaged in their struggle they were one, asserting for their independence. The BNP is not letting that spirit to return. It wants to rule either itself or not allow any other party to run the country. After me the deluge, seems to be Khaleda Zia's thinking. It may harm Sheikh Hasina but the greater harm will be that of the country. Perhaps the BNP does not see this simple logic.