

Participation is a must

Begum Khaleda Zia did not attend Sunday's meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Jatiya Sangsad. This is the committee ideally suited to sort out things like BNP's contentious issues regarding the conduct of the JS over which the party stayed out of the House for a long time.

The government has been responding very positively to suggestions that JS works effectively or governance is done solely through it as a system of Parliamentary committees, appropriately empowered and enthusiastically participated, backs it up by taking off much of the load.

She will do good to her party and the democratic cause and in fact to the whole nation if she participates in the JS and its committees by herself and not through deputizing. That is one way, very fetching way to keep her party and herself politically relevant — in other words to be meaningfully in the race for power.

The nation now is direly in need of a great opposition party and it will be a great historic feat if BNP proves up to it.

British Support

The close succession in which British delegations have been paying us visits, mostly maybe as part of their regional itineraries, but with a noticeable interest evinced in Bangladesh, has gone down very well with us.

Speaking about what we believe to be a follow-up exploratory visit of three days' duration which got underway on Sunday, led by Sir Martin Laing, Chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board, we must say it is shaping up extremely well.

Besides, echoing the opinion of the FBCCI and DCCI leaders, we dare say that, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia affirming their support and cooperation to them, matters relating to foreign trade and investment are in no particular danger.

The problems then boil down to refurbishing the physical infrastructure to attract a higher level of foreign capital investment. Indeed, it is in this vital area that we crave for British collaborative assistance in funding and technological terms in order to make a difference to our infrastructure.

Tough Task

Bangladesh Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed is now in Brussels, the European Union headquarters. He is to plead for our RMG sector's continuing access to the GSP facility which has lately come under clouds of uncertainty.

Bangladesh is not a cotton producing country and has a small number of spinning mills not to be able to weave yarns needed to meet the growing demand of our knitwear industries.

Since Bangladesh's export earnings will take an irreversible dip from a withdrawal of the GSP facility, she should get at least 3-5 years of moratorium on it to be able to develop the necessary backward linkages for self-sufficiency in the RMG sector.

Water: After Sharing Comes Augmentation

The extreme difference in water availability between high and dry flow months is the source of our problem. We must resolve this through augmentation, that is, increasing the availability of water when the natural flows are the lowest.

The most vital ferry services linking the two parts of the country is disrupted because of the low water level and rise of char lands. Even after the water-sharing agreement, the water level at Hardinge Bridge will not only remain low, it will get lower still until the lowest flow period in March/April.

Water sharing is the beginning but not the end to the solution of water crisis that we face each year. The general perception is that water is a free good of nature and therefore has no price.

After sharing comes augmentation. This must be understood by all concerned. In our country, we face one of the most complex problems of water in the world. During the rainy season, we have an over-abundance of water, often causing severe floods and disasters.

flooded lands are all dried up very soon. The extreme difference in water availability between high and dry flow months is the source of our problem.

There are two aspects to this water augmentation programme. In the long run, river flows should be stabilised by reducing the difference between high and low flows. This can be done through the construction of water reservoirs, mostly in Nepal and Bhutan, which are upper reaches of the major rivers.

The short run solution is the renewal of the old Thana Irrigation Programme — originally started in the 1960s. We must recognise that everything during the Pakistan period was not bad and the Thana Irrigation Programme (TIP) was unnecessarily abandoned due primarily to the pressure from the tube-

well lobby. Taking Thana as the unit, plans were prepared to deepen the water channels, resuscitate moribund water bodies and construct water control structures for irrigation during dry months.

In fact, it has now also become hazardous. Due to intensive use of underground water, arsenic poisoning is now spreading all over the land although we belong to a country which is basically well endowed with water.

In the meantime, the short and medium-term solutions should be initiated. The short run solution is the renewal of the old Thana Irrigation Programme — originally started in the 1960s. We must recognise that everything during the Pakistan period was not bad and the Thana Irrigation Programme (TIP) was unnecessarily abandoned due primarily to the pressure from the tube-

1970s, privatisation became the key word for development and shallow tube-wells, cheap enough to be individually owned and operated, it became the main source of expanding irrigated agriculture.

Low lift pumps are now things of the past and one will find tube-wells working close to a source of surface water — adequate to irrigate the adjoining lands. To say the least, the entire system now looks ridiculous.

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only crop. Agricultural diversification, that is growing high value crops presently constrained by lack of water, will be feasible on a country-wide scale.

If it is possible to revive the TIP in all thanas of the country by 1997, the next step for the medium-term solution will be to plan for the river barrage schemes, starting with the barrage on river Padma and other such projects which are amenable to early implementation.

There is nothing new in what has been suggested. The weakening of the Local Government structure after 1971 had weakened local development efforts of all types, including irrigation.

The water-sharing agreement has opened a new horizon. It will be an important milestone in our development history. And, along with the sharing of water, should come the augmentation of it, using strategies old and new.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

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Two years later, Fujimori seized near dictatorial powers that savaged virtually every democratic institution in the country along with measures that enabled him to implement draconian security steps that eventually crippled both the rebel movements.

Stalemate over Release of Hostages in Peru Continues

by A S M Nurunnabi

Despite growing pressure from outside, the roughly 20 MRTA guerrillas holed up inside the Japanese ambassador's home showed no signs of crumbling. Nestor Cerpa, leader of the group holding the hostages, told journalists: "We are inflexible in our original position."

FOR the background to the hostage crisis in Peru, it may be noted that Peru is the third-largest nation of South America, situated on its west coast. Quechua Indians are the largest ethnic group in the country, encompassing almost half of the total population; mestizos and whites are the other major ethnic groups.

In the recent history of Peru, a military junta seized power in 1969. In August 1975, another military coup replaced the ruling junta and paved the way for a return to civilian rule in 1980. The popularly elected civilian government in the 1980s and 90s, however, were beset with skyrocketing inflation and unemployment, a gigantic foreign debt and violence by guerrilla groups using terrorist tactics such as neo-Maoist Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

On 17th December last, the Japanese embassy in Lima, became the seat of a high drama of terrorism by leftist Tupac Amaru guerrillas when they seized more than 500 hostages to press demands that at least 400 of their comrades jailed in Peru be released.

"Let our prisoners go, or we will all die in here," one of the guerrillas told a local radio station. Not quite; they soon released the women and some elderly men. But the rest — including two government ministers, the head of the Supreme Court, the head of the anti-terrorist police and his predecessor, plus some 17 ambassadors — were firmly held at gun point. And there, except for a few who were freed to act as mediators, they stayed while the Tupac Amaru haggled for the release of their jailed comrades.

All these hostages were invited to garden party held by the Japanese Ambassador in Peru in honour of Emperor Akihito's birthday. The festivities were suddenly halted by an explosion and bursts of gunfire as about 25 guerrillas of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement crashed into the party from a rented villa next door and turned the VIPs into hostages.

The affair was a bitter blow to the government of President Alberto Fujimori, the son of Japanese immigrants. This was possibly the single most audacious act in the history of terrorists' hostage taking. The prominence of the prisoners, along with the fact that the siege was technically taking place on the soil of a foreign embassy, turned what might have been simply a debilitating domestic emergency in Peru into an international scandal.

Fujimori's strong-arm tactics between 1990 and 1992 seemed to have smashed the two far-left guerrilla movements that had raked the country since the early 1980s. Abimael Gurman, leader of the Shining Path (nastier and bigger of the two) was captured in 1992. His movement specialised in classic "Maoist" terrorism, would kill local officials, as unpleasantly and publicly as possible, kill ordinary people who col-

laborated with them; if need be, kill most of the inhabitants of an entire village, to teach others a lesson. The Tupac Amaru movement, Cuban-inspired and named after two historic leaders of the rebellion against Spanish rule centuries ago, was less ruthless, preferring embassies, bank and businesses as its targets.

For a time, those defeats for the two groups looked final. The guerrillas' only future was to keep out of sight, or risk the much-feared "faceless" military courts that try people accused of terrorism. Both groups were not actually finished, though the police made such a claim. Both groups had been hiding in mountains, and had links with (and used to prey on) drug dealers. In the past 18 months both groups had revived, especially the Shining Path, which split after Gurman, in 1993, called for it to lay down its arms. In July 1995, the Shining Path carried out several bomb attacks. They grew even bolder since then. Several attacks last July brought the resignation of the chief anti-terrorist police. As if to rub in the victory, the Shining Path, two days later, took temporary control of an entire village and later three Indian villages were overrun, "collaborators" getting the usual treatment.

Far less had been heard of the Tupac Amaru guerrillas, thought to number at best a few hundred. But last December Lima Spectacular did more than bring them into the limelight. Though smaller than its notorious rival, Tupac Amaru drew inspiration not from

China but from Cuba, and recruits from the country's far-flung shanty towns of the dispossessed poor.

From its first attack in 1982, the group leaned towards urban terrorism, much of it aimed at the US. It hurled a rocket propelled grenade at the American embassy, lobbed mortars at the US Ambassador's residence and bombed several restaurants in Lima. These acts initially imbued the guerrillas with an aura somewhat between Robin Hood mystique and radical chic. In 1990 the group staged the most spectacular stunt when nearly 50 members tunneled out of the Canto Grande prison near Lima, supposedly the nation's most secure jail.

Two years later, Fujimori seized near dictatorial powers that savaged virtually every democratic institution in the country along with measures that enabled him to implement draconian security steps that eventually crippled both the rebel movements.

Now while through a well-planned operation designed to catapult Tupac Amaru into international limelight, Fujimori wrestled with conflicting advice from his two most important allies. Japan pressed for negotiation, and the US counselled him not to cut any deal.

maintaining 73 captives include five Supreme Court Judges, eight generals, five congressmen, two foreign ambassadors. The Japanese Prime Minister felt that the situation was becoming more tense as the number neared a level the guerrillas could control. It was also felt that a reduced number of hostages could increase the likelihood of an attempted breakout or make the Peruvian government more likely to use force to end the crisis.

The rebels in recent days seemed to have hardened their stance, reviving their original demand that their 300 comrades be freed from Peruvian jails as a price for the hostages' liberation. President Fujimori repeatedly said he would not permit that even though his brother was among those held. In a communique read out by one of the released hostages on behalf of the rebels, it was stated that the hostage takers were "willing to withdraw from the occupied residence by way of dialogue. For this it is important to reflect why this extreme situation arose in the first place and to look at the situation in the prisons and the trauma through which the families of our jailed comrades have lived for years."

Batches of hostages were released, but the impasse still remains unbroken. Freeing a few bedraggled hostages at a time, the rebels occupying the Japanese ambassador's residence have kept their bargaining power strong by holding on to the President's brother and other select captives. The re-

President Fujimori's refusal to bow to rebel demands received full backing from the world's leading nations. In the strongest show yet of world condemnation of the hostage crisis, the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialised nations and Russia ruled out any concession to the Tupac Amaru holding remaining hostages, backing Peru's rejection of the militants' demands.

Despite growing pressure from outside, the roughly 20 MRTA guerrillas holed up inside the Japanese ambassador's home showed no signs of crumbling. Nestor Cerpa, leader of the group holding the hostages, told journalists: "We are inflexible in our original position."

In the latest development, Peruvian President Fujimori said he would not rule out the possibility of using force to end the hostage crisis. He added: "If some hostages are killed or injured, we might choose a different option." Putting aside the issue of the release of the jailed MRTA rebels, Fujimori said his government was ready to discuss a variety of other issues in a "flexible" manner in face-to-face talks with the rebels.

OPINION Curing Political Malaria

A Zabr

Hopeful changes over the BTV: the late president Zia's birthday public programme was screened for a lengthy few minutes in the main news bulletin; soon after BNP resumed its presence in the JS.

After a surfeit diet of non-stop, bitter bilateral political activity during the last two years which disrupted life at all levels and all sectors of the society (there was no foreign invasion), the masses got a salutary taste of what it is like to be caught between political feuds.

A similar 'stop-everything' movement is not an experience to be relished with relish, especially for reasons which look trifling after removing the spell-less egos of the split politicians. The opposition is aware of this type of negative sensitivity in the mood of the majority; and the party in power have to handle the current confrontation judiciously by the ear.

With this familiar background, the 'draw-attention' notice is on the individual politicians: are they willing to change their style (in degree or kind?) for better, acceptable performance, and try to curb the unethical practices of the party? The national consensus is slowly but surely veering towards one focus: trouble-free politics without involving the non-politicians (the students are included here), the labour and staff unions, and the bureaucracy. The politicians are squarely responsible for the development (positive or negative) of the governance of the country since its birth, whether they were in the seat or not (nature abhors a vacuum).

It would appear to the disinterested and outside observers as if the two major political parties were created for the sole purpose of wasting time on each other, neglecting the priorities of the country and the masses — develop the party first, then pay attention to the development of

the country. The politicians link up too many issues to push the party objectives, and spoil the broth. In food and eating we also have the epidemic systems loss; the greatest loss (No 1 prize) is in the political sector.

Now the opposition has decided to adopt the old maxim of building up public opinion against the big neighbour. It is going to create smoke and heat, and some tears, beatings and physical damages. The gamble is on the sudden change in public opinion.

The party in power has opened too many fronts too soon, and the opposition has added a few more to create diversions. After the simple change of the stock exchange, the KAFCO crisis appears to have been deliberately created to embarrass administration and the foreign investment watchers. Other spoke-in-the-wheel movements are naturally expected in the coming months. The consensus on the national economy is as far away as ever, despite the forthcoming Eid Mubarak greetings.

Each MP of the JS has to abide by a self-regulatory code of conduct to keep the parties derailing from the moral tracks (if they cannot do it, then the outsiders will try to do it, according to plain and simple logic: Who will be the convener and the referee? We are fond of playing (not working), but hardly bother about the rules and the regulation of the games. The encouragement comes from the top, and not from the bottom. There are many political gods (or goddesses) at the top, and the heavens are split asunder with thunder and squalls, to spoil the fields below. The professed fertilisers act as antidotes, and tend to breed political mosquitoes.

Any cure for political malaria? The preventives don't work.

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.

Lawyer goes unlawful

Sir, As a very ordinary citizen and possibly a very naive one at that there are many occurrences in this country that I do not understand. Thus it is incomprehensible to me how a busy highway can be altogether shut down by a mob for hours at an end to seek remedy for some of their personal grievances.

It also has become a common practice by major political parties to close down a major thoroughfare of Dhaka to have their political meetings or even some so-called cultural functions like, singing and dancing, causing untold misery to common people. This sort of occurrence has become so common that the average citizens have given up protesting and almost beaten up and my car damaged by a mob who were protesting against the DC of the area.

It seems only the powerful — power derived through the might of arms or political patronage — have the unfettered freedom of movement while the rest should conduct their daily lives at the mercy and whim of the ones who wield power. Here, I will relate a situation

which I believe cannot happen in a law-abiding and civilized society and if it does, I would like to know about it. A very close relative of mine has become the victim of treachery of a lawyer. The case is like this: my uncle and his sisters own large parcels of land in Sherpur Town — a small community about 120 miles north of Dhaka and also in two villages near there. As my uncle who ordinarily resides in Dhaka, but is away from the country for extended periods of time on business and personal reasons, has given the responsibility of looking after the property to one of his cousins who is now a prominent lawyer of the town.

All the living and educational expenses of this lawyer were provided by my uncle's father. This man roomed and boarded in my uncle's house for over 15 years while he pursued a law degree and later worked in a private firm at Motijheel.

As this lawyer's family were needy, my uncle never asked him to give him the income from his properties. After the lawyer became quite successful — even prosperous, my uncle wished that he start giving the income of these properties. At this, the lawyer at first claimed that nothing much grow on these lands and later insisted that not much land is left there, though my uncle all along knew the details of the lands and had all the documents. On investigation, it was found that the

lawyer and his brother had sold plots of land to various illiterate and poor farmers. In this situation my uncle is in a great quandary as the farmers who bought these lands are really very poor. My uncle is reluctant to dislodge these farmers from the lands as they were tricked by the lawyer and they bought the land in good faith, though the purchases were not legal and valid.

Now the question is: what must my uncle should do without causing any harm to these farmers? Of course, legal action against the lawyer is an option, but that will be a 20-year ordeal and this lawyer fellow committed these crimes knowing full well the harrowing difficulty, delay and expense of obtaining justice in Bangladesh courts.

We know that there are professional bodies like the Medical Association, Bar Association and the like in this country whose duty is to monitor and discipline their members for malpractice, ethical violations and other unprofessional acts. Could a lawyer or a knowledgeable reader of The Daily Star advise us what my uncle should do in a situation like this? Any advice, suggestion or information by the readers will be highly appreciated.

Naz Shafiq Naz 6 Motijheel C.A., Dhaka

Formalising a Uniform Watchdog Mechanism

Sir, Thanks to Ikram Sehgal for his writings on Pakistan. It is apparent from his writing how Pakistan is pulling through. He maintained that martial law was imposed in

Pakistan for ensuring accountability. But truth is different indeed.

We have strong objection against his remark on Bangladesh in connection with imposing martial law by Lt Gen H M Ershad. Martial law was not meant to salvage us, rather he grabbed power and fulfilled his desires only. We had to pay price for this.

True essence of our liberation struggle in '71 was to establish democracy in all fabrics of life, and still, the spirit remains the same. This is the only system that has no scope for anybody assuming the highest position in state to become recalcitrant for any cause, as the system itself always has approval of transparency.

True democracy does not need facade. The so-called elite and organised forces in order to ascend to power very often use state machinery.

A Democracy Loving Citizen Chittagong-4212

Why Should the Students Listen?

Sir, I would like to thank Dr A K Monow-war Uddin Ahmed for his valuable article published in The Daily Star on 21st January 1997. I am really convinced about his valuable suggestions regarding prevention of further deterioration of university campus affairs.