

Befitting Celebrations

The distinctly well-celebrated Silver Jubilee of our national independence has been in a class of its own leaving an impression that we are certain to cherish for a long, long time. In their depth, dimensions and inspirational quality, the celebrations befit the occasion that towered over the nation's birth anniversary observances we have had from year to year.

The totality of atmospherics around and the transcending appeal were virtually revived, in a manner of speaking. The journey of Shikha Anirban across the length and breadth of the country was a bold idea which helped to involve the people. So was most imaginatively recreated the feelings of the black night of March the 25th via the playing of the last post by the Army, BDR, Police and Ansars apart from the horns and whistles being blown all over the country. The recreative flourish with which deeper recesses of the people's mind were touched must have been a mind-lifting instruction in history for the new generation of compatriots.

Our compliments to the government for the vision it has shown in associating world leaders of such outstanding calibre as Nelson Mandela, Yasser Arafat and Suleyman Demirel with the historic occasion. This has been rightly done in the belief that their love for freedom, human dignity and scientific temper would inspire us greatly if they were in our midst. Their extra-ordinary presence has given us a leap of the mind and in this the state-level celebrations were more than vindicated.

Even so, partaking of the perfectionist flair which, by and large has gifted us with a memorable experience to treasure, we thought the celebrations could have been more comprehensive. We missed elaborate references to some wartime political figures of commemorative leadership like Tajuddin quality and also allusions to a few emerging political challenges.

In contrast to the Silver Jubilee celebrations staged in the capital city, by and large, at the state level, those in the district towns were markedly lacklustre. One wished these were broad-based and sufficiently percolatory and vibrant at the public level throughout the country.

Thank You for Coming

We have had in our midst on the occasion of our silver jubilee celebration of independence three respected foreign dignitaries: South African President Nelson Mandela, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Turkish President Suleyman Demirel. The presence of such luminaries on the august occasion has indeed made us proud. Seen as the liberator of Africa's black people and a patriot happily blending quiet courage with the vision of a sage, Nelson Mandela came to be a part of the celebration against his doctor's advice. Yasser Arafat in the same way symbolises the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people. He too had to make his time from his pressing circumstances marked by conflicts between Israel and Palestine over Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem. The Turkish president had his quota of preoccupations and we must be grateful to him for sparing his valuable time for us.

And look at the spirit, the humility the three leaders have exhibited through recalling the support — moral and otherwise — they received from this part of the world for the cause they had been and are still fighting. Yasser Arafat in particular went a step forward in that he claimed our independence as his and his people's independence. Mandela's life is an open book and if we can learn from his life, his leadership — particularly during the transition of South Africa — we will indeed have honoured the man. Let the vision of the great politician, which Mandela is, inspire us to fashion our own dreams for our country's future. Arafat still fighting for a homeland for his people is also exercising his sobering influence for a national reconciliation. Demirel comes from a country with a great tradition in secularism and as a staunch defender of this principle he and his country also leave a few lessons for us.

So the choice of the invited guests in fact reflects the course that Bangladesh should pursue. Our natural affinity for freedom of people, secular tenets and a common aspiration for economic emancipation should bring us closer to each other. We will feel greatly proud if the historic ties and moral supports are cultivated through the years to come among the guests and the host to their mutual benefit.

Pat on BGMEA's Back

Visiting head of the Child Labour Coalition (CLC) of USA Pharis J Harvey has commended Bangladesh for its competent handling of the child labour issue. The CLC chief has virtually cleared the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) of the charges of employing children in garments factories. Following the introduction of the Harkin Bill in the US Congress in 1994, US importers had refused to accept garments produced by child labour and still big companies there, particularly the chain stores, are resentful to our garments products.

Now that the head of the CLC has seen for himself the progress made in Bangladesh to eliminate child labour, the large US stores should have no complaint. He has already promised that he would try to change the stores' attitude. The sooner this is done the better. It should not be forgotten that the bill coming into effect almost all on a sudden had an enormous negative effect on our garments sector. We now need to recover from the great loss.

We also have a good deal more to do in eliminating child labour from other areas of our economic life. Now that the BGMEA has taken an initiative to give the affected children education up to a level, let this be followed up by other sectors, too. That good work needs to be emulated.

BNP's First Hartal: Domestic and International Issues

...Choose one or two items over which all-party consensus exists in Bangladesh, to start with as a confidence building measure, within the SAARC mechanism, in order to derive benefits envisaged under the proposed sub-regional group.

HARTAL is bad, generally destructive and undesirable. It disrupts the life pattern of people, causes much inconvenience and is often associated with loss of production for the nation. On the other hand, it is claimed that hartal was originally designed as an alternative instrument used by workers to realise their demands from a reluctant employer. The trend has gradually moved to include political activists and the methods from peaceful to increasingly violent means. Hartal, therefore, has now been regarded as a democratic right of the people, provided this is organised in a peaceful manner.

BNP called a hartal on the 23rd March. Judging the wide participation all over the country, they may claim it to have been a success. But whether it conformed to the connotation of a rightful hartal or not will depend upon any significant degree of violence and coercion used or not for the purpose of securing the hartal. BNP leaders and activists were seen to have taken out processions in the evening before hartal and the following morning in its support. Except for some untoward incidents, there were no reports of employment of undue force to impose hartal.

On the contrary, despite government's declaration to the effect that no obstruction would be put up, armed gangs were set against otherwise peaceful demonstrations to foil their endeavour. The result was a former home minister beaten up with a head injury and landing up in a hospital. Hundreds of BNP activists were attacked and wounded. A few members of the police were also injured, on the other side, in a sequel during the melees. So, the hartal would have passed off quietly and peacefully, unless attempts to obstruct it were made in places and at times. Can one rightfully blame the BNP for these avoidable incidents for which they themselves could hardly be held responsible?

BNP alleges that the government exhibited undue nervousness after the call of the half-day hartal by the BNP. Alternatively, some claim, the ruling party's strategy is to crush the movement right at the outset by arresting several, in this case four, leaders of the BNP in a blitzkrieg operation of Nazi style. This would dissuade others, by intimidation, from going further and would kill the movement. Unfortunately, lessons of history teach people otherwise. Obstruction generally creates stiffer obstructions. Violence begets more violence. This is more so when the first obstruction was created by the hated Special Powers Act enacted by the first Awami League government.

Although the same Awami League subsequently has given their pledge to people through repeated public pronouncements and election manifesto in favour of repealing this and other black laws, they changed their mind after securing people's votes. To make it worse, they made a public statement to the effect that the SPA, against which they had made relentless struggle for long 15 years, will not be repealed. This does not only portray betrayal of people's faith, but also constitutes a flagrant violation of fundamental human rights to detain people without charges and trial.

It is again most unfair to deny these four arrested leaders, all of whom were either ministers or state ministers, at least for the first three days due to "division" in prison, commensurate with their political and social status. They were made to sleep like ordinary criminals on the floor. They were not allowed food and water from home and even, till the time of writing this article, denied visits by their kith and kin. Dur-

ing the last five-year rule of the BNP, despite unprecedented provocations through 170 days of hartal and seige, no important opposition leaders were arrested, except for a very few during the last year of the rule only to be released shortly thereafter through Presidential intervention.

The first Awami League hartal took place after five months of BNP's assumption of power almost six years ago. It took nine months for the BNP to call their first hartal after the present government took over power. This does not surely justify the BNP to call the har-

ting party. Over a hundred BNP workers have so far been killed and ten thousand others have been arrested and some of whom tortured, it is claimed. The arrests of the four BNP leaders and commencement of hounding of other leaders and workers, if not reversed or stopped early, may portend ill-omen for all. The stock exchange debacle and crisis in other financial sectors are well-known to everybody.

The reasons for the shortage of power were attributed to what was termed failure of the BNP government to add even one megawatt of electricity to the

with India, provided it is fair and equitable and its safeguards our legitimate interests.

BNP considers the treaty has not been fair. Though it is a long term treaty, provision of its review every two years gives the stronger party an upper hand in interpretation and assertion of a point, specially in the absence of an arbitration clause for settling any dispute. No guarantee clause like in the interim treaty of 1977 exists and the water actually obtained by Bangladesh so far under the treaty falls much short of the quantum envisaged and even less than the corresponding figure of last year.

It was also alleged that the former prime minister completely forgot to raise the water issue during her official visit to India. This is totally false. The joint communiqué issued following the visit incorporated the subject adequately, identifying the issue and expressing resolve of both sides to continue efforts for a settlement. Unfortunately, such blatant disregard to truth was voiced even on the floors of the parliament, seeking the stamp of veracity to make innocent people believe in what is untrue.

About the transit and corridor issue as well as the proposed sub-regional grouping, many BNP stalwarts feel that the decisions in favouring them had been given as a *quid pro quo* or made conditional to the water treaty with India at the time of its signing. This was vociferously denied by the ruling party. Yet, they agreed to these proposals separately within only a few months of the conclusion of the Ganges treaty. All these national issues had been done in a great hurry without discussion with the opposition in or outside parliament. That renders the method undemocratic and the real intention



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

What justified the hartal, according to the BNP high command, is a series of steps, or absence thereof, taken by the government in various fields to prove their incompetence in the domestic sector and imprudence on the international plain. Among the reasons advanced, deteriorating law and order situation, arrests and repression of BNP leaders and workers, mismanagement of financial sectors, frequent interruption and inadequate supply of electricity, water and gas, partisanship of television, even the mosquito menace, are noteworthy.

The ordinary people, both urban and rural, are well aware of the increasing spate of crime, terrorism and extortionism practiced throughout the country. Of course, one may and generally does enjoy unofficial immunity as a supporter of the

existing power supply during its rule. Many leaders have time and again stated this publicly. On the contrary, BNP claims that during its rule as much as 581 megawatt of power was added to the national grid and work on generation of further 800 megawatt would have been completed had there not been disruption of economic activities for two years by the then opposition resorting to hartal, siege etc.

The international activities under reference generally relate to our growing relations with India and mainly focus, besides the controversial water treaty, on the question of granting transit and corridor to India and formation of a sub-regional group. Much have been discussed about the water treaty. It would be an admirable feat to sign a long-term water treaty

What is the way out of the predicament? The steps are not much difficult to take. Release the BNP ministers; hold them back after definite and concrete charges are brought against them and, if necessary, impose restrictions on their leaving the country. Make an end to haunt other BNP leaders and workers. Terminate repression of political workers of the other camp. Go slow on the scheme of partisanship and on bestowing patronage. If there is any scope still left for it. Try to see how the water treaty works on ground, before making commitments to other issues with India. Allow transit facilities to India through the Asian Highway passing through from Dhaka-Chittagong to Myanmar. Do not take precipitate action about granting corridor from India to India through Bangladesh via Jessore-Dhaka-Sylhet. Try to rectify the enormous imbalance of trade with India and to reduce smuggling from India, if indigenous industry is to be protected. Choose one or two items over which all-party consensus exists in Bangladesh, to start with as a confidence building measure, within the SAARC mechanism, in order to derive benefits envisaged under the proposed sub-regional group.

All these measures are workable, given the will to do it. These will not harm interests of the ruling party. On the contrary, it will enhance its prestige and popularity. To view from the negative angle, this would tend to disarm the opposition BNP and leave their arsenal empty of effective weapons to fight the five-year rule of the Awami League. A peaceful atmosphere will then prevail and political parties will fight its strength democratically after four years. Patriotic citizens and their well-wishers will be relieved and happy to watch the democratic process grow in a healthy manner in a country of democratically minded people.

Neglecting the Better Half

While females have a lot of political clout at the ballot box, unfortunately this does not translate into the corridors of power after Election Day. Lip-service is given to equal opportunity for women by having a handful of reserved seats in the NA.

ACCORDING to the generally accurate 1981 population census, there is a slight majority of females over males in Pakistan. However, according to the roll of registered voters in 1993, there are more males than females among them. Whatever the actual count the fact remains that the two sexes are more or less almost in equal numbers. That is where the parity comes to a dead stop, thereafter there is enormous disparity in the social and political disciplines, a disparity that has translated into not only severe pressures on the economy but also on the fine socio-political balance. In the National Assembly (NA) there are a handful of female MNAs, the Senate does not have a single female. While there is a plenty of rhetoric about evening out the imbalances but religious, cultural and psychological reservations among our mostly conservative population emasculate any real commitment towards the goal of ensuring equal opportunities to women. We have seen in our lifetime that disparity of any kind can have unfortunate consequences.

A cursory examination of the 1970 elections, conducted by Gen A M Yahya Khan, generally considered to be the most free and fair in Pakistan's history, shows that in the West Pakistan, Zulikar Ali Bhutto's support was derived from a preponderance of women responding to his "Roti, Kapra Aur Makan" slogan, an economic aspiration resulting from the unequal sharing of the economic pie. From 1970 to 1997, almost three decades, this support remained firm for the PPP.

A post-election Pathfinder survey to determine the anomalies in most of the pre-

election polling — that could not only reflect the size of Mian Nawaz Sharif's landslide victory revealed that a vast majority of the PPP voters who stayed home rather than vote for the Zardari-dominated PPP were women. Similarly in the increase of voters for Mian Nawaz Sharif, the vast majority were again women. Thus it was the "women" factor that ensured Mian Nawaz Sharif walked into the National Assembly (NA) with the biggest mandate in Pakistan's electoral history. Another startling fact to emerge was that a fairly large segment of voters, particularly females, who would have voted for Imran Khan, voted for Mian Nawaz Sharif since they thought he was a surer bet in ensuring that Benazir Bhutto did not come back to power, in effect a negative vote of sorts. In sum, while females have a lot of political clout at the ballot box, unfortunately this does not translate into the corridors of power after Election Day. Lip-service is given to equal opportunity for women by having a handful of reserved seats in the NA. If that should become a reality as promised by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), the next descending exercise would be to carefully choose such representatives from among females who would not be too vocal about women's rights and thus become an embarrassment to the ruling party.

There is strong element of male chauvinism in our political leadership, shockingly Benazir also subscribed to it except in rhetoric and some

strong cases. In all fairness there must be a drastic increase in the number of women's seats (perhaps on the basis of Proportional Representation (PR) to an extent) from 20 to at least 50 and instead of the present *modus operandi* of selections, a democratic way of "straw poll" among the female party faithful must be adopted in each constituency to choose their representatives. PPP's Benazir Bhutto or for that matter, PML's Begum Abida Hussain, must not be taken as really representing Pakistani women given their political heritage they are capable of winning elections on

sustained their tremendous progress because of the substantial increase of women in their working population, particularly in high-tech industries and services. A closer model is Bangladesh, which less than two decades ago was labelled by Henry Kissinger as an "international basket-case". Starting first with garment industries which are almost 100 per cent populated by women, the number of women earning money has increased by leaps and bounds over the last decade. The Grameen Bank made it possible for a vast number of women to make money within

many miles to go" (with apologies to Robert Frost), there is now light at the end of the tunnel. Conversely, one adverse effect has been severe electricity shortage as the planners did not cater for the increased demand because of the new female entrepreneur class, in business, professions and the commensurate domestic increase in usage.

Pakistan will remain economically in a confidence among the female population, there is now definite hint of disenchantment at what is being perceived as gross neglect. Noticeably this is being felt at the grassroots level, the female PML supporters inclined at the present to blame local leaders up to the Provincial level for not giving access to the Federal hierarchy except to "special interest", "well-connected" or "controlled" groups.

While the voices are still muted, the PML should be well advised about the dangers of dealing with "women scorned". If this perception of neglect persists, then instead of reaping the advantages of their potential, the PML may well find themselves on the receiving end of a similar campaign that downed Benazir. This would be fatal if the economy does not show positive signs of recovery, women being concerned most with food on the table. The PML have a tremendous opportunity to tap into their vast female support resource and force-multiply their potential they would be well advised to acknowledge women power and use it effectively instead of seeming to neglect the better half.

AS I SEE IT
Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

their own against any contender. Begum Abida Hussain is not only positively Prime Minister-material in her own right, unlike PM-twins Benazir she is also a lady of considerable maturity and brilliance. It is, therefore, an irony that she is today in the Federal Cabinet as a sop to the female constituency.

It is interesting to analyse why some Asian countries have become Asian Tigers. Indonesia and Malaysia made their extraordinary development mainly because of the vast mineral and natural resources available but even they have

the parameters (or in the vicinity) of their home despite a lack of education. This innovative and pragmatic entrepreneurial force-feeding increased the volume of money being recycled into the economy. Instead of creating jobs in medium and heavy industries, which cost a lot of money, in scarce foreign exchange, self-employment opportunities have been created which in turn has increased the number of jobs in the services sector, both for males and females, dramatically rejuvenating the economy. This snowball effect has raised Bangladesh from the economic dumps it once was in. While there re-

when we repent our sins and confess them humbly to God, He will forgive us and help us make a new start, living for God. Therefore the Friday on which Jesus died, was and is a Good Friday. So the cross became the most known Christian symbol in the world: it is the symbol of God's love for people.

However simultaneously with an economic plan we must have substantive political initiatives, something that is very much within the capacity of Mian Nawaz Sharif to deliver, given his enormous mandate.

Given the course of events since the elections, the PML has not shown any inclination (except for plenty of lip-service) to acknowledge the sizeable contribution made by Pak-

Of Good Friday and Easter

by Rev. Bart Baak

ther, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me; yet not what I want, but what you want?"

3. Jesus' death was a fulfilment of the Scriptures: After his resurrection (see later on in this article) Jesus said to two of his disciples, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24: 25-27).

4. Jesus died on the cross for our sins: Sin means rebellion against God and his creation, in thoughts, words and deeds, individually and collectively. The heart of the problem is the human heart. "The heart of man is devious above all else; it is perverse — who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). We in our generation are confident that basically we all are right. And yet this generation above all others is raping the earth, squandering non-renewable resources, polluting the environment (now Dhaka is one of the most polluted cities of the world!), and resting satisfied that one-third of the world is overfed while the other-thirds are in need. Ours is the generation of genocide and torture unparalleled in the history of the world.

5. Jesus' death was a ransom: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". (Mark 10:45). The word "ransom" was widely used in ancient world. It applied to release of slaves and prisoners. "Ransom" means redemption through payment of a price. Jesus gave his own life as a ransom for us. This is the ultimate example of love.

6. Jesus died in stead of us, i.e. in our place: Nowhere in the Bible this is expressed more impressively than in one of the prophecies of Isaiah 53:7-7 "But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we all turned to our way, and the Lord (God) has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". Sin demands payment and punishment. Jesus in his sinless life paid that debt on our behalf on the cross.

7. Forgiveness is costly to give and humble to receive: Christians believe that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was made once for all, and that every time

are still guilty of not glorifying God and loving Him with the whole of our being. That's why we need forgiveness. Jesus' death on the cross is the foundation of God's forgiveness to sinners.

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Even if we ourselves do not commit these terrible crimes we

the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection were hallucinations.

Indeed we cannot prove the resurrection logically. Faith is no science and the resurrection of Jesus as told in the Gospels was never intended to be a matter of academic discussion. But why should we not accept the resurrection of Jesus as the greatest gift God could give to people? Is anything impossible for God? Is He not the Almighty God, stronger than the death? Jesus' death and resurrection are matters of faith.

They appeal to me to entrust myself more and more to God, who will forgive me and offer me a new life again and again when I have sinned. That is what the Bible mentions of atonement or reconciliation. "And it is God's hope and grace that I in my turn will forgive others as they have sinned against me: my wife, my husband, my children, my friends, my colleagues, my enemies....."

This is clear: we never are able to solve the mystery of Good Friday and Easter, but if we will accept it, it will give us a glad and grateful heart.

I know that my Redeemer lives, what comfort this assurance gives!

He lives, who once lived on the earth, through his death now brings new birth.

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