

Why Hartal?

What we have been saying for more than six years now (ever since this paper was born) is that with a rickety economy and toddling democracy we simply cannot afford a call for strike or hartal. This we said when Awami League were in the opposition. They did not listen. But now that they are in power, they definitely understand the logic of our position.

Ironically, when in power, BNP were extremely pleased with our anti-hartal stance. Apparently they do not feel the same way today. As the party in opposition they are not likely to do so. They seem to have forgotten everything they said while in power and want to call for hartal at every possible opportunity. Let us not forget that Begum Zia, as Prime Minister, termed those who caused hartals as enemies of the country and of the people. Is hartal now a good thing just because she is calling for it? This question is as much valid and relevant today as it was when Sheikh Hasina was in the opposition.

Regardless of who is in power, we are going to oppose hartals as persistently and as vigorously as we did in the past, for the simple reason that it is bad for our economy.

Much, if not all, of the trouble the AL government is now facing is the crippling effect of the blows it gave to the economy while being in the opposition. Frequent hartal calls at that time created an environment of down-playing the economic impact of such action. The same thing is going on now. When BNP calls for hartals, their only concern is how hot can it make the seat for the ruling party, and not how much damage will it cause to the national economy. The tragedy, therefore, is that the leaders of the country which perhaps, more than any other country in the world, needs to focus on the economy most, do the least. It is all a matter of convenience. Our political parties do what suits them, not what suits us — the voters.

What is the reason for the hartal call next Sunday? Opposition feels that the price hike of fuel will adversely affect public interest. A very laudable sentiment. But why is BNP going for an action which will hurt people more? There is only one explanation for it. It is, as we said, politics of convenience.

We have already criticised the government for raising fuel prices radically. But we cannot, for the love of our people and our economy, support any call for hartal to negate the jump.

DCC's Radical Venture

Starting next year Dhaka will have 120 healthcare centres run by NGOs on behalf of the Dhaka City Corporation. The DCC will build another 70 healthcare centres in the other three corporations of Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. We like the DCC idea of caring for the physical well-being of the residents of the four biggest cities of our nation, going rather out of the way. The plan seems to be well thought out and it features many radical departures and is well on its way to completion. The NGO idea is novel and worth trying.

The misgiving that comes pat to one's mind in this very good sounding case is why is DCC dashing into new country when its own pasture is unkempt to say the least? It has great healthcare responsibilities, true. But all of it was traditionally discharged through carrying for the preventive side of healthcare — providing potable water to all residents and healthgiving surrounds and ample space and greens etc., all to the good of the residents' health. Sewage underground and garbage over must move fast to ensure the city's prevention of disease. Can anyone say the DCC had creditable performance in any one of these? So creditable that with this front well secured the DCC wants to work more and in unfamiliar and extra curricular country?

The cause for DCC's enthusiasm leading to incursion into curative medicine is not known. But an overdose of enthusiasm has made it blind to the unfortunate ends that agencies having exclusive charge of medical treatment of the people, have come to. Look at the government hospitals of all kinds, general and specialised. They are all ailing. Why? They have money and they have the facilities. They have even the required expertise. One reason is they are too much crowded. DCC's wild idea of helping the hospitals by freeing them of the outpatients — wild because this is simply not its business — is bad in the bargain for the hospitals are not going to improve a wee bit because of this relief. Hospitals here are hells not because of outpatients but more because here is a moneymaking racket going on uproariously at the expense of the afflicted ones' helplessness and misery. Why is DCC jumping into this bad act in such a big way, forgetting its own cares? Is DCC confident that they can create islands of professionalism and humanity in a land infamously devoid of it in the medical sector? If not, please don't go for this.

But this is perhaps too late to change a committed stroke. Why didn't DCC talk earlier of embarking on such a high-minded thing? Because, it feared dissents coming from all corners? It will perhaps be two years before the citizens can enjoy the benefits of the centres. We hope to see DCC excel in its orthodox duties in the mean time.

Let Film Society Control Act Go

It is difficult to ignore the contribution of a film society in developing cinema lovers' faculty for appreciating the aesthetic imagination behind the whole art of cinema making. Particularly in our country where good film is a rarity in the procession of poor remakes from crass commercial exploitation on the celluloid.

As a forum for upholding the concept of film movement, the role of a film society is much appreciated and encouraged elsewhere. Calcutta Film Society is the oldest of its kind in the region. The first film society in this part of the world was formed way back in 1963. Drawing inspiration from that lone ranging act of the sixties, a number of film societies have sprouted since independence. However, a law — the Film Society Control Act — was enacted in 1980 to bring this innocuous exercise of enlightenment under the shadow of an unnecessary statutory vigilance. Is film society big enough an entity to require a law to save the society from its 'ill effect'? Are the laws of the land not enough to deal with any cases of moral transgression by the film societies? They definitely are.

The present government has done a great service to country's culture by repealing the century old, colonial dramatic performance control act. Let it do way with this other instance of philistinism — the absurd Film Society Control Act as soon as possible.

The Rural USA: Welcome Changes

The development in rural areas in terms of infrastructure and other facilities are leading to reverse migration from urban to rural areas — a syndrome we are eager to see in Bangladesh.

RURAL economies are assumed to be dominated by agricultural activities or agriculture related activities. That was, probably, so in the US even in 1950 when farming contributed one-fifth or more of the country's total earned income. Today's rural economies in the US are more dominated by other activities and farming accounts for less than 2 per cent of income, farming provided 14 per cent of all rural jobs in 1969, that proportion dropped to about 7 per cent in 1993. Manufacturing, services or government jobs now lead US rural economy — especially the service sector. Retirement and recreation activities are particular bright spots in rural landscape.

Once upon a time, people from rural areas migrated to towns in search of better jobs, now the trend has reversed. During the first half of the 1990s, rural and small town areas portrayed a significant comeback in rural population: rural population rose by 5.1 per cent during 1990-95, nearly twice the rate of growth during the 1980s. About 1.3 million more people moved from metro America into rural and small town areas than moved in the opposite way — a direction of net population flow contrary to that of any other time in the 20th century except for the 1970s and not how much damage will it cause to the national economy. The tragedy, therefore, is that the leaders of the country which perhaps, more than any other country in the world, needs to focus on the economy most, do the least. It is all a matter of convenience. Our political parties do what suits them, not what suits us — the voters.

Natural resources e.g. land, timber, water, reportedly, are exhibiting a new role for many rural areas. Natural resources have been important for their extractive values which, in the last two decades, have been replaced by amenity values to boost population and employment growth. For example, retirees are drawn to rural areas rich in scenic beauty and endowed with moderate climate.

Farm numbers are expected to go down by about 2 per cent or less per year for the rest of the decade reaching 1.6 to 1.7 million by 2000. The fall in farm numbers does not pose any threat to nation's food supply in the wake of increased labour productivity. The gradual replacement of older farmers by the new ones is contributing to the increased productivity. An increasing proportion of US food and fibre is reported to be generated by fewer and fewer farms. For example, the census of agriculture tells us that about 12 per cent of all farms (689 thousand) used to account for one-half of all sales of agricultural commodities in 1940. By 1992, the share dropped to 3.2 per cent (62 thousand). The growing concentration of production among fewer is expected to continue into the 21st century, at the expense of a decline in small commercial farms. However, although smaller

farms are losing significance as suppliers of food and fibre, they are still considered to be important actors in environmental and land use policies with a control over major share of US farmland.

The US farm commodity programmes evolved at a time when the average income of a farm household was about one-half that of all-US households. About 30 million people lived on farms in 1930 — 24 per cent of the total US population and

Farm households, on average, depends more on income from off-farm sources for family living than on income from farming. Exclusive reliance of non-commercial farms on non-farm activities could be in evidence. Large farms, relatively, eke out a better income slice from farming. Farming is capital intensive business and to generate average US household income, they need substantial assets.

There is no doubt that US

However, economic and policy environments have changed dramatically since 1930s and the 1996 Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act (1996 Act) evolved mechanisms that tie price and income supports to production controls. It is being argued that "phasing out of commodity programmes is not likely to lead to any large-scale displacement of farm operators on a sector-wide basis. First, farm payments will add to farm income and can be used by producers to facilitate whatever financial restructuring and rationalization that needs to take place. Secondly, the farm sector, in the aggregate, is currently financially sound."

US producers are already using many market risk management strategies e.g. keeping equity in cash and current assets, buying crop insurance and spreading sales over the year. Smaller enterprises with a

greater dependence on off-farm income are in a stronger position and, according to a USAID handout, have increased market volatility and income swings. Larger diversified operations are in a strong position to take advantage of production, marketing and financial strategies to manage risk. The medium size farm (smaller commercial farms) appear to be the enterprises most in need of timely market information and a research and education programme designed to identify alternative risk management strategies and to improve risk management skills.

By and large, the US farms are new rearranging their production structure in accordance with changing demand pattern of the US and the global concerns. Priorities are shifted in consort with demand and supply elasticity of products. The development in rural areas in terms of infrastructure and other facilities are leading to reverse migration from urban to rural areas — a syndrome we are eager to see in Bangladesh.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

56 per cent of the rural population. The US farm commodity programmes aimed at raising farm family income eventually to ameliorate both US and rural poverty.

The low income status of rural households persisted well into the 1960s. The income level differences tapered off to a parity during the 1970s and have remained that way ever since. And improved access to rural non-farm jobs and income played an important role in achieving the income parity.

government policies were directed towards raising farm income. The 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) is construed as a landmark piece of legislation in the history of American farm policy. In fact, the 1933 AAA gave the US government a new role in the management of the US farm sector.

The AAA included production and marketing controls and prices and income support programmes for many of the most important farm commodities.

ASEAN's Role vis-a-vis Regional Situation

by ASM Nurunnabi

Washington publicly says that accepting Myanmar into the ASEAN fold gives the junta the legitimacy to continue or it will even worsen its despotic ways. If pressure were applied by neighbouring ASEAN countries, it could be far more effective than protests from the West.

THE Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has indefinitely postponed Cambodia's entry into the regional economic bloc, originally scheduled for July 23 in objection to the violent change of government by Hun Sen, one of the country's two prime ministers. ASEAN has now sought a role in mediating the conflict and sent three foreign ministers to confer with Hun Sen. Initially Hun Sen spurned the diplomats. Subsequently, Cambodia, reversing the rebuff it had issued, said it wanted the ASEAN to mediate in the conflict between the two warring prime ministers.

ASEAN's decision not to accept Cambodia as a full member was a big mistake because it may force the country to look its immediate neighbours for support and investment," second Prime Minister Hun Sen said. "I told them that the ball is at their feet. Hun Sen said referring to the visit there of three Foreign Ministers from members of the ASEAN. "Whether ASEAN plays that ball or passes it to others to play it is their own decision. We have to know whether ASEAN needs us

or we need another." Diplomats and analysts have noted that since the ASEAN decision was made, Hun Sen made several overtures to China including ordering the closure of Taiwan's representative office in Phnom Penh and cancelling a deal with a Taiwanese airline.

On the other hand, there were indications from ASEAN that the recent coup in Cambodia be rolled back and the old government restored.

ASEAN's role with reference to Myanmar was also looked upon with some misgivings in some quarters. Myanmar's new membership in the ASEAN has caused problems for the group's relations with the European Union and the United States. The United States had lobbied to keep Myanmar out of ASEAN, citing the country's huge heroin trade and repressive military regime, which had ignored the results of 1990 elections. Washington and some European leaders had called for isolation of the Myanmar regime, and the US government has banned new American investment in the country. The EU has said that it is not ready as yet to see Myanmar accede to

an economic cooperation between the two regional trade groupings. From the ASEAN side, it has been stated that "we might sit down with the EU and find out what kind of problems they have with Myanmar being in ASEAN." It was further stated that the nine-nation group also faced problems with the United States. That has something to do with the issuing of visas to senior Myanmar officials travelling to the United States. The 30-year ASEAN originally devised as a bulwark against communist Indochina, lately admitted also Laos to the group.

The US Secretary of State hauled Myanmar over the coals as ASEAN's newest member. Citing military-ruled Myanmar "an anomaly within ASEAN" the US Secretary of State said it was the only member "where the state and society are fundamentally at odds" and whose government "protects and profits from the drug trade." It is further stated that "Myanmar is inside ASEAN but it will remain outside the southeast Asian mainstream and isolated from the global economy until accountability is restored. That is not an admonition but an ob-

jective fact that must be acknowledged." A European source said that the reference to the long-held ASEAN policy of gentle persuasion was just a "smokescreen" since constructive engagement had so far failed to show concrete results.

In this context, the US Secretary of State urged ASEAN leaders to meet pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi when they visit Myanmar and give her support. "It is ASEAN's responsibility to convince the SLORC (Myanmar military junta) to open up a political dialogue with Suu Kyi's political party."

Observers also have indicated that though ASEAN insists that its policy of "constructive engagement" with Myanmar's generals was prompted by its eagerness to keep that country on the path towards democratic and free market reforms, Washington publicly says that accepting Myanmar into the ASEAN fold gives the junta the legitimacy to continue or it will even worsen its despotic ways. If pressure were applied by neighbouring ASEAN countries, it could be far more effective than protests from the West.

To the Editor

What next?

Sir, Our leaders are busy celebrating different occasions/functions competing with each other at a time when the country is running through a deep crisis — one blaming the other for their faults and errors. The share market is at stake. The economy of the country has reached the point that it will be totally shattered even with another slightest touch. The saddest part is that nobody bothers to realize the problems of the common people. But still the commoners are carrying on. The deeper part of the crisis is that nobody seems to take up the leadership having due sense of honesty, integrity, morality etc. The country is being ruled just for the sake of it! The only thing being done is that some people are sitting in their chairs and taking advantages of their positions.

Sylhet is practically still detached from the rest of the country after the severe gas leakage. Those responsible for this major accident should have been taken to task; nothing has been done so far. Couple of months back without giving even 24 hours notice the office timing had been changed. One by one the names of most of the institutions, streets etc are being renamed. What is in a name? Will the tax-payers have to pay less tax than before or the prices of the commodities will come down or the majority of the population will have three good meals a day by calling a rose a tulip? Despite of what already is going on; again a disastrous thing took place — the price-hike of petroleum — which means a massive blow on the waistline of economically crippling nation. What next?

Shamim Choudhury, Banani, Dhaka.

A better Dhaka?

Sir, When a two-page four-colour ad converts "US \$" to "Taka" and "acres" to "bigha" it is obvious how much intelligence your readers are credited with. It is therefore not surprising that they have the gall to refer to "high class apartments", "boating club", "country club", "a school of international standard" and a "hospital managed by an American hospital group" — as being "for the benefit of the community"? Are we talking of the same community whose idea of a "high class apartment" is a mud-hut with a tin roof; a "boating club" a group of fishermen in their dingy boats, "coun-

try club" being farmers smoking a 'hucca' under a banyan tree; and a 'school' is a chalk board nailed to a tree trunk?

It is amusing that the self-proclaimed social and environmental angel's objectives are to "Build a Better Dhaka," probably it's the first time they even heard of the place. Are we to presume that the project is going to be a self-sufficient, independent cocoon — with no effect on the neighbouring areas and shall not be taxing on the already inadequate infrastructure? How naive can one be?

It has always been the tragic fact that we dumb Bangladeshis need a smart "100 per cent foreign owned company," to tell us what's good for us. Many professionals, intellectuals and the community itself have expressed doubts about the project in question and none — including the "do-gooders" have felt it necessary to discuss the matter with the very community whom the project is supposed to benefit.

Of course, I think the learned advertisers for the comment, "utilise scarce government resources for other immediate purpose such as poverty alleviation, rural development etc." Thank you Sirs! I think the whole two-page ad should have had this comment only and the readers would not question the purpose and intent of all concerned in the project.

The Gulshan Lake Development will change forever the face of Dhaka city — before that truly happens, let there be "abashan" of this project.

Munir Dhaka

Macro economic constancy

Sir, People of the country had given their verdict in favour of this government to bring about changes in the lot of the common people. And the lot of common people will not be changed until or unless the whole economy is geared up. To beef up the economy, a strong and vigorous economic policy is required and government is fully responsible for it.

Regulating a economy like Bangladesh is an arduous task. And the job of Finance Minister is obviously a brainstorming one. He makes the headway of an economy. He is praised and severely criticised for every action and decision conducted by his ministry. In the last one year, economic performance is gloomy despite political stability

and no major natural disaster. Our minister might be complacent for achieving GDP growth at 5.6 per cent. This rate has been achieved due to better performance of agricultural sector (agri growth rate 5.7 per cent in 96-97 compare to 1 per cent in 95-96).

Each and every macro economic indicators showing dismal picture of the economy considering last one-year performance. This happened only for the government's wrong policy (to some extent) and inefficiency of some ministries concerned. In this context I like to focus on current liquidity crisis. Presently banks are suffering from the liquidity crisis and the reasons behind this are the government lags in revenue collection, its excessive borrowing from various banks and cascading effect of last year's capital market scam.

Notwithstanding taking all favourable macro economic measures like currency devaluation, increase of bank rate, recovery of bank loan etc., and reduction in import expense should have geared up the liquidity of the banks. But things did not happen as it was expected.

As we know industrialisation is the only solution to relieve us from the curse of poverty. Large scale investment is prerequisite for industrialisation process and interruption in funding will hamper the whole process. The irony is that industrial growth was only 3.3 per cent last year compared to 13 per cent in 95-96 fiscal year, which has to be double digit in any way to reach GDP growth rate at 7 per cent. In current liquidity crisis, banks are unable to give industrial as well as business and trade loans. Money supply must be increased to give an impetus to the ailing industrial sector. There is a direct relationship between money supply and inflation — increased money supply without productivity leads to inflation.

In current context, government should inject more money to upbeat resource mobilisation process. There is an apprehension regarding inflation remains, but the spill-over impact will bring more good than harm in the economy. In this context, China could be an example for us. China experienced both double digit growth and inflation last year. But the lashes of inflation was not so harsh as both soared simultaneously and growth rate offsets the bitter inflation. In addition to that, China enjoyed huge Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the last

several years which is totally absent in our country. Amount of FDI shows more dreary picture, negligible amount of FDI arrived so far in Bangladesh. Even our neighbouring country Myanmar successfully fetched \$3 billion last year despite its controversial military rule, whereas we did only \$30 million.

Export earnings, FDI, remittance and all sorts financial assistance help to build up a handy foreign exchange reserve and liquidity as well. Overall export earnings and remittance are up but slashed revenue collection and increased public spendings lead to current liquidity crisis and ever-lowest foreign exchange reserve in last seven years.

We need some bold, effective and charismatic steps from the Finance Minister which will stir the economy positively. The blame for failure in regulating this sort of economic issues must be shouldered by our Finance Minister as well as the government.

Noor Mohammad
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Neither 'over' nor 'under'!

Sir, Dhaka's pedestrians do not prefer to use the over-bridges or the underpasses, according to press reports. The underpasses are said to be controlled by the denizens of the underworld of hoodlums and toll collectors, and the over-bridges are not attractive to a 'developing' society looking for short-cuts in life.

Before spending a couple of crore taka on these civic amenities, did the planning team include psychologists to study the motivation aspects of the users? The latter is built up through educational and publicity campaigns. It is a sad reflection on good governance when armed guards have to be posted 24 hours a day at the underpasses. For how many years?

The physical planning of these structures might be all right, but how to lay the foundation of good governance, which we have been trying for half a century? The politicians, who are supposed to be professionally qualified to run the state, appear to be helpless and without a sense of direction. Who will put pressure on whom?

A Zabr
Dhaka

OPINION

One Generation Later ...

Lutfey Siddiqi

To those of the post-Bangabandhu generation such as myself, the war of liberation enkindles romantic images of bravery, heroism and success. There is no doubt that the leadership of the time, symbolized by the charismatic Bangabandhu, displayed incredible courage, radical vision and urgency of action, that led to the declaration and achievement of independence.

It was no small achievement. Mobilising an entire population onto an uncertain path of war, suffering and sacrifice is an achievement of epic proportions by itself. No one talked of how impractical, infeasible or utopian the goal of independence was. It was enough that the goal was noble and desire to attain it, passionately.

So I believe, the most precious jewel in our history of independence is the spirit that prevailed at the time: the spirit of courage, energy, revolutionary vision and dramatic passion. What is thrilling about this spirit is that it is the necessary and sufficient ingredient for a nation to achieve lofty goals.

On the other hand, what is disheartening is the fact that this spirit that earned us our political independence has dissipated in the years afterwards to make way for apathy and disillusionment. Talk to any 22-year-old like me and you will know what I am bemoaning. We have lacked serious leadership for so long that we find it difficult to care anymore about what happens to Bangladesh. Corruption and seeming inaction on the part of the government (whoever is in power) has been the norm for years now and to make matters worse, we've resigned ourselves to a sense of conservatism — as if things can never change.

We are now afraid of dreaming about an 'unthinkable' future, afraid of thinking radically — in other words, not a drop of the spirit of indepen-

dence has survived. So when the Awami League jumped into a costly frenzy of political activity which resulted in the overthrow of the BNP regime last year, I amongst others, was euphoric in anticipation of a change that would mark a significant break from our immediate past. We were expecting a radical agenda, spirited leadership and a well-directed (if not trouble-free) drive towards visible progress.

Unfortunately, we are still drifting lazily. At least that is what it appears to be. And appearance is all that it is or not, we have a new conditioned by a world of satellite TV and multimedia communications where 'image' is of utmost importance. And nowhere is image as important as it is in attracting investment into the country. The stock-market crash and recent opinion polls on corruption have already done great disservice to this image. What makes it worse is the government's nonchalant attitude towards these — as though things will pick up automatically.

I urge our leadership to look at themselves as leaders and to talk to us, motivate us at every opportunity. Talk to us about specific goals, strategies, timeframes and involve us in a developmental vision.

That we have a plenitude of latent patriotism was apparent at the Bangladesh cricket team's ICC victory. That we have a high rate of return in this country is apparent from continued investment in the country despite hartals and bureaucratic bottlenecks. We have the potential — what we need is a reoriented leadership.

The greatest tribute today's government can pay to the memory of Bangabandhu is to rekindle and more importantly direct the spirit and vision that he embodied. Dare we take up the challenge?

The writer is a Masters student at the London School of Economics

The Road Ahead

Fahim Ahmed

For many nations around the world, 1997 has been a year for introspection, a time to cast off the shackles of the past and stand tall to face the future. July witnessed the termination of formal British Empire as the island of Hong Kong returned to the Chinese fold, signalling a final end to the colonial supremacy of Europe. August in South Asia marked the 50th anniversary of partition, as India and Pakistan celebrated the numerous achievements of the past half-century, with an eye to the even greater promise that lies in the future. For those of us in Bangladesh, we should use the final years of the waning millennium to reflect upon the tremendous possibilities that the future holds, always remembering that such potential cannot be fully realised without a great deal of discipline and sacrifice.

We stand now in the adolescence of our nationhood, scarcely a quarter of a century old. And just as for any other young, the developments during these years shall leave the most lasting impressions on the character of the adult. The choices that we make today shall be felt not only tomorrow, but for decades to come. Thus the colossal responsibility that lies with this generation of leaders cannot be understated, nor can the monumental nature of the task ahead be underestimated. At the same time, however, we cannot afford to be intimidated by such thoughts, for success is by no means out of our reach.

The single-most important duty that we face today is to ensure that the democratic tradition — not even a decade-old — remains firmly in place, to ensure that democracy is enshrined as an inviolable institution in our nation. Last year's general election should therefore be viewed as a resounding success by all Bangladeshis, regardless of party affiliations, for it revealed the depth to which a dedication to democracy already exists. And yet, we cannot remain satisfied with the status quo, for the practice of democracy, by its very na-

ture, requires constant change and improvement.

In the political arena today, far too much debate is centred upon party divisions; indeed, at times it seems as if the major parties exist only as counterweights to the others. All political debate that occurs must be issues-based, and cannot be burdened by the weight of past feuds and personal vendettas; our poor nation can ill afford to waste its precious resources on such squabbles. As was true over a century ago, a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Indeed, in order to achieve our nation's vast potential, we must have the full cooperation of the various parties. The government of the day — regardless of which party it may be — must proceed with an expansive plan that is as audacious in its nature as it is precise in its execution. The problems that we face are as grave as they are numerous: the atrocious mismanagement of the banking system, the grossly inadequate healthcare sector, the dreadfully oppressive cloud of pollution that permeates our cities, and the even more oppressive stench of corruption that taints our bureaucracy, to name but a few.

But we cannot be daunted by the size of the task before us, for we must proceed with great boldness and an unshakeable sense of purpose. Indeed, the many accomplishments that mark our recent past attest to the possibilities of the future, such as the remarkable achievements in population control, the amazing feat of arriving near gender parity in primary education, and the tremendous strides made in child immunisation. The possibilities are truly endless, but in order to triumph we must act together, and we must act now. Let us not waste this opportunity, which comes but rarely in the history of a nation, when we step out from the old and into the new. Divided we cannot succeed; united we cannot fail. The choice lies wholly with us.

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