

This Is Not the Way

Secretariat building was the disturbing image of a battleground in the last few days as rival factions battled on its precinct over the revised pay scale and change in office hours. It is the method, the paralytic imposition on state's executive hub in severance with demands of discipline and the code of government service which we find unacceptable.

As a paper The Daily Star has always maintained that the new format of weekly holiday is not suitable for us. It should be changed simply because we as a people have not developed the work ethic that would make sense of the two-day weekly holiday as a well-deserved, replenishing break from the work. As evident it has already amounted to greater pilferage on work hours. For a poor developing country like ours, the present five-day week is a luxury we can ill afford. We feel the demand aired from a section of the government servants is grounded in realism and the government should seriously consider its position regarding weekend.

Revision of the new pay scale, the other issue on the agitators' agenda, is a matter that requires candid and considerate discussion between the government and its employees. Standpattism and an indiscreetly rigid stance can only make matters worse. Because the pay issue is not only a matter of comparative considerations of several economic factors with the financial ability of the pay master as its nucleus but it also is a matter of opinion. A dialogue with open mind is all that is needed to resolve the crisis. Secretariat employees are the most 'in people' when it comes to government relationship with the citizens of the Republic. If they have to take recourse to stock trade unionist activities like stop working and stopping others from working, then what impression people both at home and away will form of the country? The behaviour shown by the agitating secretariat employees is appalling on the ground that the office hours they wasted in the pretext of pressing home their demand actually belong to the public; it is on the law-abiding tax-payers' money they are maintained. Office hours for them is absolutely sacrosanct. They better not forget that.

New Era in Sino-US Relations

The United States of America and the People's Republic of China, two giants in the residual multipolar global matrix of power, following the break-up of Soviet Union, have come close to each other in a historic renewal of contact occasioned by the visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin to Washington. The tenor for the summit was set by the following words of US President Clinton: "Both our countries can best advance our interests and our values by working together rather than standing apart."

While they exchanged notes on respective political histories and ideologies, and held long and almost philosophical discussions on human rights, Tibet and Taiwan, the world stood witness to their signing of a number of agreements encompassing nuclear non-proliferation, and trade and economic cooperation. What could be a more ringing testimony to the spurt in their relationship than the establishment of a hotline between Washington and Beijing aimed to maintain regular contacts.

It has been obviously a far cry since the days of Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and Deng Xiaoping, but whether the latest bon homie has rewritten the history of Sino-US ties one has to wait and watch. The best way to ensure this though would be to have improved people-to-people contacts on a sustained basis.

Meanwhile, the hardened inimical countries may do well to take a cue from the new cooperative spirit shown by the USA and China, what with their baggage of historical differences.

How Are They Growing!

While the capital city's problems with breathing gets worse with the minute, the number of air-polluting two-stroke-engined auto-rickshaws and tempos keeps on increasing without any sign of let up. How can one explain this? There has been a hearsay about some court injunction incapacitating the government in carrying out its programme of gradually bringing down the strength of these dangerous vehicles. Can this be true? One would like to know about the progress of the case and the costly delay there is getting a verdict, this way or that.

It is at once ludicrous and horrific to know that, by some strange magic, the court injunction has led contrarily to an illegal spurt in the number of those poison vehicles. So much so that now Dhaka city alone is said to be slow-poisoned by 63,000 such carriers, a strength allowed by the BRTA for the whole country. And the government can do nothing about stopping that! Strange. Who's going to buy this nonsense?

Only a pall of eye-burning, heart-boggling, nauseating black smoke hangs on the scene. There is no escape from this anywhere in the city. If one has got inured to even such a high degree of pollution, said to be the highest in lead pollution in the world, one would need only a short trip to the districts to be wizened to the kind of reality Dhaka is. Disembarking at Sadarghat or Kamalapur or Gatali, you take an auto and before even making it to your residence you will fall sick.

The administration as well as the administered are suffering from the smoker's syndrome. A smoker doesn't care about ruining himself or others around him. The warnings don't mean a thing to him. So is our administration. They don't seem to believe what they bear or even themselves articulate about the planet-busting time-bomb of air pollution and presently, its great and grave threat to our people's health.

We simply want the two-stroke things out. And right away. If you are a responsible lot, take charge and deliver.

Soros' Sorrows

"I contend that an open society may also be threatened from the opposite direction — from excessive individualism. Too much competition and too little cooperation can cause intolerable inequities and instability."

GEORGE Soros is a prominent capitalist and a fore-runner in fortune-making from the financial market. He is considered as a financial kulak with immense wealth and enviable resources. Having lived through both Nazi persecution and communist oppression, he started veering the veritable virtues of open society. But at his disposal, of late, he said capitalist launched heavy attacks on open society and laissez-faire capitalism — the harbours of his fame. Since 1979, his relentless efforts at mobilising funds for opening up closed societies — stretching over 25 countries — ably drew worldwide attention.

But now, he seems to be unhappy with the end — open society — for which he marshalled his means. "I now fear that the centrammeled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism and the spread of market values in all areas of life is endangering our open and democratic society. The main enemy of the open society, I believe, is no longer the communist but the capitalist threat." ("The capitalist threat", The Atlantic Monthly, volume 279, No. 2 February 1997).

Soros lived with the impression that the collapse of communism would facilitate the groundwork for building up open societies. But realities

turned out to be far short of the dream. Western democracies failed to rise up to the expectation by showing very little interest to come to the aid of those who have defended the idea of open society in Bosnia or anywhere else. Engulfed with grief, Soros was forced to re-examine and revisit his pet idea — "open society".

Long ago, Karl Popper in his book The Open Society and Its Enemies (1945) showed that there was very little difference between fascism and communism. One is extreme to the right and the other to the left. But both tend to bank on state power to repress the freedom of individuals. Soros says, "I contend that an open society may also be threatened from the opposite direction — from excessive individualism. Too much competition and too little cooperation can cause intolerable inequities and instability." Soros denounces those who religiously believe in the magic of the marketplace. The notion that common good is best served by the uninhibited pursuits of self-interest — an adage that laissez-faire appears to uphold — is put to serious question. He argues that unless

swirling search for self-interest is tempered by the recognition of common interest, overriding particular interest, the present system of "live as you like" — an open society paradigm — is liable to an immediate collapse.

The main scientific underpinning of laissez-faire ideology is also being challenged by Soros. He argues that Economic theory is an axiomatic system:

as long as assumptions hold good, conclusions follow. The best allocation of resources that is likely to come from free-market play of demand and supply is one such axiomatic phenomenon. To be specific, assumed perfect knowledge in the world of perfect competition is very unlikely to conform to reality. Further, assuming demand and supply as given, government intervention as an evil

episode, the laissez-faire ideology diminished the necessity of income and wealth redistribution.

The laissez-faire argument relies on the same tacit appeal to perfection as does communism. It claims that if redistribution causes inefficiencies and distortions, the problem can be solved by eliminating redistribution — just as the communist

economist. Another problem with laissez-faire argument: survival of the fittest doctrine is undercut by the fact that wealth is passed on by inheritance and the second generation is rarely as fit as the first.

Under laissez-faire, states do not have principles. They have interests to be determined by geographic locations and other fundamentals. Two glaring defects of the economic doctrine need mention. First, just as economic treat of individuals, so is treated states as individuals. If and when states disintegrate, geopoliticians find themselves totally unprepared and sunk, second, it does not place common interest beyond national interest.

The Cold War time was relatively a stable arrangement. No side dared to attack the other for fear of counterattacks from enemy of almost equal strength. But with the internal disintegration of one superpower (e.g. USSR), the stable world gravitated to disorder. The individual pursuits of self-interest fail to bring order to the world. "I blame the prevailing attitude which holds that unhampered pursuit of self-interest will bring about an eventual international equilibrium; I believe this confidence is misplaced."

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Soros argues that the open society concept be redefined. It should occupy a middle ground where rights of the individuals are safeguarded, but some shared values would keep the society stand together. The middle ground is threatened on the one side from communists and nationalists doctrines that call for state domination and on the other side from laissez-faire capitalism that tends to insert greater instability and eventual break down.

Soros' sorrows thus lie in the ways that open societies are being defined and tuned. Open societies of today do not, allegedly, inject any hopes and aspirations amidst whirlwind of self-aggrandisement. It overlooks community interests. But a failure of open societies to deliver goods should not mean that we should revert to fascism or communism. What it bells at is the realisation that too much individualism, pervasive haunt for self-interest should be barred through appropriate government interventions. Stateless open society and society without openness seem to be two sides of the same coin. They both conduce human uplift. They mock at emancipation — be it political or economic.

Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes

claimed that the duplication involved in competition is wasteful and therefore we should have a centrally planned economy. But perfection is unattainable. Wealth does accumulate in the hands of its owners and if there is no mechanism for redistribution, the inequities can become intolerable. Money is like muck, not good except if it spread." Francis Bacon was a profound

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 33rd and 34th Prosecution Witnesses

Continued from yesterday. Following are excerpts from PW-34 Subedar Jaimul Abedin by Advocate TM Akbar, defence counsel for Lt Col (LPR) Muihuddin Ahmed: Q: You can't wear uniform, if you are not in service. A: Correct. Q: Did you give statement to the IO? A: Yes. Q: Was the statement read for you? A: Yes. Q: At that time you told the IO that you had retired from the service. A: Not true. Q: When did you join the army. A: I joined the Pakistan Army in 1969. Q: You had your training in Pakistan? A: Yes, at Cambelpur Artillery Centre. Q: What training did you receive? A: I had my training in the trade of OCU (Operator Communication Unit). Following are excerpts from PW-33 Havildar (ret'd) Selimuddin by Advocate Khan Saifur Rahman, defence counsel for Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooqur Rahman: Q: How far was the residence of Bangabandhu from the place where Shamsu was killed, three others were injured and you got faint? A: About 25 to 30 yards. Q: In which direction was the residence from that place? A: North-eastern. Q: How far was the Mirpur Road from that place? A: About 400 yards east. Q: You need to go for arithmetical account to fix the target for Artillery firing. A: Yes, but that is done by an officer. Q: The target for artillery fire is fixed ensuring the safety of infantry troops who are positioned ahead of the artillery. A: Yes, but necessary directives are given by officers. Q: What is the maximum range of an artillery fire. A: It has different angles. Q: What was the angle taken on the day of occurrence. A: Probably it was low-angle. Q: How far was the place from you where the shell was exploded. A: About 25 to 30 yards south-east of the lake near the water. Q: Is the mother of August fell in rainy season. A: I don't remember whether there was any rain in August, 1975. Q: When you came from Comilla, did you bring your arms and all other things with you? A: Yes. Q: Was Sobhanbagh mosque within the jurisdiction of your patrol duty? A: At that time there was a small mosque beside the road, but I can't say whether it was the Sobhanbagh Mosque or not. Q: When firing started, you five were together. In which position you went after the firing. A: I can't remember who was in which position. Within a minute, I came out of the guard room. Q: In which position were you? A: Probably I was standing. Q: You were not in a position to watch whether bullets hit anyone. A: There was no possibility of being hit by bullets, because those were passing overhead. Q: Did you see the bullets? A: Bullets can't be seen, only sound can be heard. Q: Where you in a position to see whether the bullets hit anyone. A: I can't say whether anyone was hit by bullets. Q: Was Capt Bashir informed of the death of a soldier and injuries of three others of his unit. A: Capt Bashir came to the barracks in the afternoon to see me and came to know about the killing and injuries of soldiers. Whether he was informed earlier or not I don't say. Q: Capt Bashir used to stay at Ganobhaban. How was he to be communicated? A: I don't know. Q: Did you go to meet the injured soldiers after feeling well on August 15? A: I was such both mentally and physically. My senior asked me to take rest and I left for Comilla after two days. Q: What was the name of your senior. A: I don't remember. Q: Were you in a position to walk when you were sick. A: There was restriction on our going out of the area. I was also very weak. Q: You kept the blood stained clothes with you to show it to Capt Bashir. A: No. Q: You hid the clothes as the blood was of the family members of Bangabandhu. A: Not true. Q: Artillery shells are like bombs. A: Yes. Q: The shell which was fired weighed 33 lbs. A: Yes. Q: What impact does a shell have if it is exploded on a soft ground? A: It is not known to me. Q: Did Havildar Gani witness the incident of killing. A: I don't know. Q: Did you see Gani. A: I didn't see him when the shell exploded. Q: He was in the guard room. A: I don't know. Gani was there when I was there from 6 pm to 11. After that I don't know anything about Gani. Q: No artillery shell exploded there and none was killed or injured. A: It is not true. Q: Did you think that Shamsu was killed in firing from Bangabandhu's house. A: No, I don't think so. Q: Was there any counter firing from Bangabandhu's house? A: I faintly heard the artillery shelling. I don't know about any counter firing. Q: Court of enquiry which took place in Comilla asked you to show your blood-stained clothes. A: Not true. Q: Shamsu was killed and three others were injured with bullets. A: Not true. Following are excerpts from PW-33 Havildar (ret'd) Selimuddin by Advocate Sharfuddin Mukul, defence counsel for Taheruddin Thakur: Q: Were you a havildar on August 14. A: I was a gunner Naik. Q: Who was the Army Chief. A: Major General Shafulah. Q: Were you in the army on August 15? A: Yes. Q: From August 15 till 1987 you were in service. Who were Army Chiefs after Shafulah till your were in job? A: Major General Ziaur Rahman, Ershad, Atiqur Rahman and Nuruddin Khan. Q: Ershad also became the President. A: Yes. Q: Where were you during 1986 general election? A: In Savar Cantonment. Q: Jatitya Party of Ershad and Sheikh Hasina's Awami League contested the election. A: I don't remember. Q: You were not aware of the incident before the firing on August 15. A: It is true. — UNB Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

ALTHOUGH the tobacco industry is putting up a valiant effort, occasionally it loses one. Somehow, no one knows exactly how, it managed to slip into our tax-cut legislation a \$50 billion tax break for tobacco producers. The tax break was squirreled into a bill to underwrite health care for children, it was offered at the last moment so that there would be no debate and discussion. To this day no one knows who introduced the bill. This is one theory of how it wound up there: Four plumbers wearing skimmaks — two from the tobacco industry and two senators from Southern states — broke into the Budget Committee hearing room with the bill to give the tobacco people a tax break. One of the men took the health-care-for-children bill and tacked the tobacco interest law on the end of it. "That should do it. No one will be able to find this with all the garbage that the budget bill is full of." A masked senator said nervously, "Suppose some one finds it and they vote to repeal it?" "You are worrying for no reason. No one is going to discover a tobacco tax break in a bill this large." The other masked senator said, "I always like to sneak in a bill when no one is looking. I once got the Senate to approve an Air Force based in my home state when they were voting on a bill to eliminate scarlet fever." One of the tobacco industry plumbers said, "I can't get our tobacco bill to stick to the budget bill." "Did you try Scotch tape?" "Yes, and even Elmer's glue. Senator, you are going to have to introduce an amendment to this bill guaranteeing a windfall for the people who make cigarettes." "I would be honored." He raised his hand over the bill and said, "I hereby propose a \$50 billion tax-relief amendment for anything that has nicotine in it." The other senator said, "I second the motion." All four plumbers said, "Aye." The bill was rolled up and put on the Senate majority leader's desk where it rested until someone came across the wording and raised Hades. An anti-smoking senator voiced his objection and demanded a repeal of the tax break. It was agreed to 95 to 3. The four plumbers met that evening to drown their sorrow but were cheered up by a tobacco lobbyist who said, "There is always tomorrow night." By arrangement with Los Angeles Times syndicate and UNB

OPINION Precepts and Practice

A Husnain BTV devotes a lot of footage to the observation of anniversaries — almost five times a week, 20 days a month, and more than 200 days a year. Such paranoid behaviour is not seen on foreign telecasts, especially emanating from the developed countries, who have been enjoying independence and freedom for centuries. The leaders appear to have a weakness for this type of vicious trap, some bordering on sentimental crap. The microphones and the cars are overworked to suffocation (and resulting distortion) and cause traffic jams inside our world of imagination. Also, the footmilling of the bureau-mash operations runs into a couple of thousand miles a year. At periodical intervals, we may pause and ponder on the usefulness of these platonic exercises, when we have hardly advanced five years in 25 years (we are ahead in non-doing). The solemnity of the vocal fury of the speech-makers is numbing, creating a guilt complex in the listeners for neglecting the duties of the state and the heart. Addicted Bengalees have now taken to foot-slog-ging and get standing ovation. Now slogan-mongering has become a subconscious outlet; with other negative side effects we see in our society today, such as defiance of the authority, scant respect for administrative discipline, the parallel administration by the CBAs (trade and office unions), the breakdown of law and order. On second thoughts, perhaps the anniversaries are not responsible for such irresponsible behaviour. Nepotism and the dislike to form a queue in a line for getting some service have similar subconscious fears: "I may be left out." People desire, and demand, service out of turn. This is noticeable at all levels of the society, vertical or lateral. Seeking undue favours is the order of the day — the opportunity might never come again. That might also be the reason why a Bengalee cannot relate to a stranger Bengalee, until and unless the latter's antecedents are known in the format of a mini-biography, through embarrassing personal questions relating to self, ancestry and private details of life, including salary earned and the number of children. The urban metropolitan lifestyle is slowly changing the trend, but still the 'unholy curiosity dominates the society. It is a fact, whether unfortunate or not, that our society is overwhelmingly dominated by the political leaders and their followers (or deserters), who have crowded out the blooming of other flowers in the 'flooded desert' of super egos, chasing bankrupt ideas and non-practices. Humility does not sell these days. The tradition continues, and the mixed soup is still over the fire, stirred by multi-cooks, armed with multi-ingredients, to concoct multiple versions of democracy in six dimensions, which even Einstein's Theory of Relativity cannot cover or explain. Coming back to Bangladesh Television (or 'State Service'), we are faced with the basic question: what is the definition of 'news'? There are several supplementary questions: What are the rules for sorting the order of priority of the day's news items; and how much footage to allot to each item, if the discretion is left to professional hands without undue interference from the authority? An analysis of the data will reveal the time slots given to the non-formal sector, the private sector, and culture and art events where officialdom is not present. Slogan-mongering is as unregulated as Dhaka's traffic. Exercise the body and regulate the mind, or regulate the body and exercise the mind? We cannot do both at the same time; we are not yet that much developed.

BNP should return to Parliament

From Page 1 erment. Yes, the government, through its majority, is able to do what it wants within the constitution and the law of the land, but not without a thorough scrutiny — and reprimand when appropriate — by the parliament. According to the opposition, the government is selling our interest to India, it is concluding a treaty in the Hill Tracts that is against the interest of the country, the government is oppressive, corrupt and guilty of every possible sin under the sun. If so, then where's better than the opposition expose all this than on the floor of the parliament? By boycotting the parliament the opposition is in fact abdicating its responsibility, and as such can be termed as an 'accessory' to the crime that they claim the government is committing. We have sent the opposition to the parliament as the WATCHDOG on the government. Where are they? As far as we are concerned they have abandoned their post, and as such not worthy of our trust in the future. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in a speech in London, has invited the opposition leader to ask her as many questions as she wants, and even to "corner" her with all sorts of difficult questions. We think it is a fair challenge, and a chance for Begum Zia to "expose all the anti-people and anti-state activities of this government" on the floor of the parliament if she is sincere and if there is substance in her claims. To all this BNP will say "We are not given enough chance to have our say in the parliament. That is why we are boycotting it." Again we accept this claim, for the sake of argument, that BNP does not get as much chance to speak as their position commands. Then how much chance does it get? If the expectation is 50 per cent, then does BNP get 45 per cent, 40 per cent, 35 per cent? BNP obviously can't claim that it does not get ANY CHANCE, for we see extensive coverage of parliamentary debate on the TV and hear its full coverage on the radio. The point we are making that given the full coverage on radio and substantial coverage on TV, BNP is far better off "exposing" the government inside the parliament than boycotting it. Then again we can further improve the media coverage by making TV coverage also total. As for the procedures inside the parliament those can also be further improved. Having boycotted the last few sessions opposition has deprived us for seeing how fairly or unfairly the Speaker would have conducted the proceedings. We now have it officially that BNP will give as many BNP members in the Committees as it wanted — 113. If so then we can expect the Committees to start functioning. This will give much more chance to the opposition to "expose" the government than it had ever before. Throughout this write up we tried to argue that regardless of what the government does, both politically and morally BNP is far better served by staying inside the parliament. We did not get into judging who is right and who is wrong, and assumed that the opposition is Right and the government is Wrong. The idea was to see the whole argument totally from the opposition angle. Even after taking such an one-sided position we reiterate the stand that BNP should end its boycott and go back to the parliament for its own sake and for the sake of democracy. Then again there is the future to consider. AL boycotted the parliament while in opposition. This is prompting BNP to do the same now. What will happen in the future? If, for example, BNP returns to power in the next election then AL will boycott the parliament. Each party will point to the previous opposition as justification for its action, as BNP is doing now. AL did not earn any respect