

Another Pointless Hartial

Barely a day passed since we ran a leader on the lack of direction in our politics the capital went through yet another pointless half-day strike. Despite being well in the know about the timing of the club meeting in the city and, more importantly, a last minute plea from the representatives of the donors community, BNP and its allies stuck to their half day hartial call. More than registering their protest against 'government repression' it was the thought of giving the foreign delegates an impression about the popular support behind them which seemed to have contributed to the recalcitrance of the hartial callers. But have they gained anything? Hartial is no longer a trial of strength. It is only because people want to stay out of harm's way that streets wear a desolate look during the hartial hours.

BNP has every right to register its protest but why does it have to be at the cost of national interest? Can a party as big as BNP avoid the responsibility by making reference that the party now in power adopted the same tactic to register its protest when out of power? What BNP is doing now stems from a pure revenge motive. The only rationale it can offer for this sequence of disruptive programmes is that it is paying back the ruling party by the same coin it was once paid. But then the question that stands unanswered is with whom does the buck stop? When does this suicidal streak of vengeful rivalry end?

We believe by making and sticking to Tuesday's strike call BNP has made its claims of national concern infinitely weaker. It has not only contributed to economic enervation of the country by robbing seven work hours from a day but it has also conveyed an impression of its carelessness about country's interest to the outside world.

This destructive trend which is prevailing now in our politics originated from defeatist mentality and it has to end. Opposition has to rise to the occasion and challenge of constructive criticism and opposition. For its part the party in power must evolve better ways than 'beating' the opposition to acquiescence. The spate of unnecessarily oppressive police action that we saw specially in the last couple of weeks must not revisit us.

How to be A Good MP

Some international heavyweights are in the city. They are not here to make a splash of any kind. A very constructive kind of thing they are doing, quietly. They are giving a three-day seminar to our MPs on what may be phrased as 'After election what'. A very useful crossfertilisation of ideas is certainly taking place there, to the benefit of the participants from Bangladesh.

Thanks to the decision of televising Jatiya Sangsads sessions, the nation at large can now relate itself to the performance of the MPs as was never possible before. On the other hand the MPs have got an unprecedented chance to play to a nation-sized gallery. This is allowing the people a kind of peep that is contributing heftily to the cause of transparency in governance. The MPs are by definition political animals and they have come to the Sangsads by dint of superior political performance in the constituency. But performance in Parliament is altogether a different game.

The problem we have here is the MPs, by virtue of whips and the anti-defection rules, are a prisoner to the party. More than representing the people and serving first their interest, the MP is a partyman totally given to serving the party's interest. A case of dual loyalty it is and this becomes a problem when, as in our case, the loyalty to the party preceeds and far exceeds the loyalty to the people. Which is not a desirable thing at all and is contrary to the MPs' constitutional and moral obligations.

It can be argued that it is wrong to take national interest and party interest as not being always identical. But in practice the two had hardly ever fully coincided in our history. So? It is for the party and its leadership to encourage its member MPs to cultivate independence and be fully people-oriented.

They would get better MPs that way which would benefit the party. The MP has a covenant to fulfil with his constituency. That is his or her first obligation. Parties have come to loom larger than the country. A politician knows he or she can bully or beguile his constituency into winning the election but the party cannot be bullied or beguiled into giving a repeat nomination. For the practical minded MP the party continues to be the first or may be the only consideration.

This is one of many things built into our political practice that tend to undermine democracy from within. If the parties have the best interest of the country at heart, they must temper their overpowering presence before the MP. The MP in turn may come out of the rut by an eager and generous helping of knowledge and expertise.

Out to Scuttle

From being wary of the shockers interminably administered by the ultra-militants within Shantibahini ranks we have happily graduated to a congenial condition in which they seem to have fallen in line with the general tribal craving for peace in the CHT. While that negative factor is largely out of the way, it is our own political parties now which in a nexus are out to scuttle a peace accord that is all but ready for adoption.

BNP, Jamaat, and even Jatiya Party have taken recourse to rumour-mongering as a tactic to poison the minds of Bengali settlers about the ensuing peace accord. They are propagating messages despite repeated government disclaimers to the contrary that the draft agreement envisaged 'eviction' of Bengali settlers and withdrawal of armed forces from the CHT leaving the plainlanders there completely in the lurch. If these political parties are genuinely convinced that provisions in the 'treaty' are 'anti-Bengali', then why don't they allow these to be placed under public scrutiny after the signature ceremony and prove their point beyond any shadow of doubt to a greater damage of the ruling party rather than prematurely declare a doomsday which they cannot defend with hard evidence. In the process, they are only having a question-mark raised about their sincerity, credibility and seriousness about a matter of vital national importance like replacing decade-old turmoil and insurgency by normality, peace and reconstruction. Scare tactics and falsehood are not the stuffs a genuine debate is made up of.

Before the potentially turning-point meet between the NCCHT and the PCJSS takes place on November 16, there should be no further breach in the congeniality of the environment, either from our own political parties or from the Shantibahini by way of raising any fresh question on issues settled many times over.

Can You Promote Investment by Putting Old Wine in New Bottle?

If the previous experience of the country in the business of attracting foreign investment is any guide, it can be argued that the government lacks an up-to-date and efficient mechanism to make best use of the inflow of foreign capital.

BANGLADESH is once again hosting an international investor's conference in the capital city — titled A New Era for Growth and Investment — with an obvious goal to attract foreign capital for the development of its infrastructure as well as manufacturing and industrial bases. Managed this time by London-based *Financial Times*, this conference is primarily geared at enticing foreign direct investment (FDI), while the previous one, managed by Euromoney in 1995, focused almost solely on portfolio investment.

As usual, it will take some time to measure the outcome of this year's conference being participated by hundreds of local and foreign investors, and actively monitored by government as well as donor agencies. But one has to acknowledge that the organisers of this year's conference have avoided high-sounding titles like "Bangladesh — Emerging Tiger," — which was the theme last time around in sharp contrast to such a flowery melody, this year's theme is unquestionably a down-to-earth one. The organisers deserve credit for it.

Calling a Spade a Spade

Every knowledgeable person in this country knows Bangladesh is neither emerging nor a tiger, it is rather a land full of problems with little prospects to keep its head above the water. What it needs most is not poetic overflow of emotion or an elaborate orchestration of political rhetorics or an overt exercise of bureaucratic extravagance at state expense. As an impoverished people, it rather needs pragmatic and concrete measures to boost domestic as well as foreign investment in order to achieve 7 per cent annual growth rate before stepping into the next millennium. The sole objective of the conference ought to be to make it happen. Of course, the galaxies of

domestic and foreign speakers — that are scheduled to entertain each other at this stately function — will address wide-ranging issues and concerns, among which overall conducive nature of the existing investment climate in the country will most certainly receive preponderant importance. Yes, the organisers of the conference has toned down the rhetoric of the event this time around, but what has the nation did lately to stimulate new investments from domestic and foreign sources?

None should have any illusion about it — attracting substantial inflows of foreign capital would require not less than a herculean effort to stabilise the macroeconomic foundations, ensuring sound political stability, providing dependable infrastructural facilities, establishing well functioning administrative, legal and judicial systems as well as an ever vigilant civic society. None of these prerequisites are in place in the country today. That, however, doesn't mean that all developmental or business activities should be halted once for all. This only means that unless such a conducive investment climate is put in place, the country will continue to move in snail's pace.

Obstacles are Transparent

With all its backwardness and drawbacks, Bangladesh provides an essentially transparent case for potential investors — both domestic and foreign. For example, they don't have to conduct expensive research to find out that its an essentially corrupt society, that the bureaucracy here is the number one enemy of investment and growth, that the politicians are almost always up

for grabs, that most of the prominent business houses are nothing but looting complexes, that the universities here are producing non-employable work force, and most trade union leaders are nothing but organised gangs of robbers.

Of course, such a characterisation of the existing conditions of the society sounds cruel. But none should expect that the foreign investor don't know of these. Just two years ago, a South Asian desk manager of a reputed portfolio company cast aside all these as "matters of no concern as long as profit margin remains sky-

high". Of course, that goal was accomplished, somewhat. This time around, it won't be fully out of sync to expect a little bigger accomplishment from such a state-sponsored and state-financed carousel.

Different Focuses of Investment

Anyway, this year the focus of the conference is different — more on infrastructure development and financing, aimed at development of energy and telecommunications sectors, port facilities, roads and



CROSSCURRENTS

by CAF Dowlah

rocketing". Everybody now knows why she said so. The shrewd international portfolio managers — in close collaboration of a section of greedy stock-brokers here — took advantage of the then burgeoning stock market of the country. No wonder, a big chunk of portfolio managers — representing many international firms — paraded at the Euromoney Conference in 1995.

As usual, one fine morning these seasonal birds disappeared. In the meantime, a large chunk of the meager resources of this impoverished nation was siphoned off to foreign banks. It is disgraceful that even one reputed international bank, which claims to be a development-partner of the country, took advantage of the then non-lock-in provision of the stock market, and made easy money knowing fully well

bridges, export-oriented businesses, manufacturing and industrial establishments. Major players among the sponsors are also different — a different political party is in power, most government functionaries representing the Ministry of Finance, Board of Investment (BOI), Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), Privatisation Board (PB), Bangladesh Export Promotion Zone Authority (BEPZA) are now different.

With such a sharply different sponsor set-up and management, and above all, with foreign investors' eyes squarely focused on the nation's oil and gas reserves, one hopes that this conference will bring forth remarkably different outcome. Many critics dismissed the earlier one as a high profile gimmick orchestrated with the sole aim for extension of the tenure of the then executive chairman

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 35th Prosecution Witness

Rashid saheb?

A: Yes
Q: Did you ever see Rashid, Farooq and their wives altogether?

A: I didn't see them with their wives together. But I saw Rashid and Farooq sahebs at my unit many times.

Q: Had you go to the residence of Major Rashid at cantonment?

A: Yes, for official purpose.

Q: Were their houses adjacent to each others?

A: Yes.

Q: Did any such incident take place that you went to Rashid saheb's house and came to know that he was at the residence of Major Farooq?

A: No.

Q: Do you know the wife of

A: No, no such incident took place.

Q: In which case you have come to give witness?

A: In Bangabandhu murder case.

Q: Did you witness the incident?

A: I watched some of the incidents and came to know about others from my troops.

Q: Are you bound to inform the superior authorities if you find any subordinate committing crime?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you make any report to the higher authorities about the August 14 and 15 incidents done by your unit members?

A: The higher officers themselves were involved in the in-

cident.

Q: There was no necessity to report.

Q: Was there any military intelligence agency at that time?

A: Yes.

Q: How many?

A: That was not known to me.

Q: More than one?

A: I didn't know.

Q: Their activities are secret.

But their offices are in public inside the cantonment.

A: Yes.

Q: It is your duty to inform them if you, specially the army personnel, see any act that goes against the state.

A: We have to go through proper channel.

Q: Was Lt Hasan your imme-

diate senior officer in the unit?

A: I can't recall.

Q: Who was superior officer of your CO?

A: Commander of 46 Brigade, Col Shafat Jamil.

Q: Did you make any written or verbal report to your immediate senior officer about the August 14 and 15 incidents?

A: No, as the officers themselves committed the incidents.

Q: Did you tell the CID and magistrate: "Ali Mia, driver of CO Rashid saheb, came at about 5 am by a jeep and informed me that Sheikh Saheb had been killed. Martial-law has been proclaimed."

Hurry up, I went to the unit by my bicycle."

A: I can't recall whether I told them this.

Q: Had you have gun practice in Karachi?

A: Yes, by light anti-aircraft artillery gun.

Q: Were CO was in India on a training till April, 1975?

A: Yes.

Q: Was his wife Zobaida Rashid at their cantonment house at that time?

A: I can't remember it.

Q: Did you tell the CID the story for the first time?

A: Yes.

Q: Did CID ask you to go to DGF office for your statement?

A: No, as I was on pension.

Q: Don't you know that DGF informed the police about you?

A: This is not known to me.

Q: Did you come to know about martial-law from Ali Mia at first?

A: Ali Mia told me that martial-law had been proclaimed. But it was not true. There was no martial-law before August 24.

Q: Were your troops on duty outside the cantonment since August 15?

A: Yes.

Q: They were posted to civil areas due to the martial-law.

A: No. They were deployed not for martial-law. They were sent to civil areas at the order of my CO Major Rashid.

Q: The Field Intelligence Unit (FIU) is situated only 300 yards ahead of the Lancer unit.

S: I don't know where the FIU office was situated.

Q: The DGF office was and is inside the cantonment.

A: It was inside the cantonment. I don't know where the DGF office is now situated.

Q: The DGF comprises Army, Navy and Airforce.

A: Yes.

Q: Like now, army intelligence were in the old and new airports at that time.

A: Army intelligence might have been deployed in the old airport. But I don't know about the new airport as it was not functioning at that time.

Q: The three chiefs move along with their respective security.

A: I saw their security when they came to our unit. I don't know about outside.

Q: Security personnel also guard their residences.

A: Yes.

Q: Military police guard them outside their residences.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know that the telephonic message to and from station commanders and other senior officers are recorded?

A: I don't know it.

Q: Had you have to make any statement for your unit's participation in the August 15 incident?

A: No.

Q: General Osmany went to the cantonment after the incident and addressed the jawans. Can you recall it?

A: No, I can't.

Examination by advocate TM Akbar, defence counsel