

Violence Coursing Up

We voice a very grave concern over not merely a rapid-fire deterioration of political violence in the country but also a tendentious eruption of it without any direct provocation or incitement given to the same.

An impression hits home irresistably from newspaper reports of Tuesday's happenings in Chittagong that these were more simulated than spontaneous. Not quite stemming from any triggering event of the moment even allowing for the noisy clamour over a police jeep, something of a red rug to the bull given the rather topical flourish of police activism. What followed but not preceded BNP chief Khaleda Zia's speech was veritable hellfire; but this was hardly of a kind that aimed at wrecking the major attraction of the CHT accord-related protestation programme which must have been Begum Zia's address that was allowed a smooth run anyway. So, the finger gets rather unpointed to the other side.

Having said that much on the hell-bent stoking of fire, let's take a re-look at the mindset BNP had got stuck with from day one of this government's handling of the CHT question. It stayed away from the National Committee's negotiations with the PCJSS by relinquishing membership of the body in what appears to be a deliberate ploy to retain the right to criticise the government regardless of the merit or otherwise of what would transpire from the talks with tribal leadership.

The high-voltage BNP stridency against the supposed contents of the forthcoming peace accord on CHT is incongruous with any factual, scientific and rational approach that one would have expected a responsible opposition party to adopt on the question. BNP has not produced a shred of evidence that the Bengali settlers and the Armed Forces indeed face an ouster from the area as a consequence of what has been negotiated with the PCJSS. While the government has put at rest such apprehensions point by point, the BNP has gone nowhere near assailing the ruling party with contradictions based on concrete evidence. To our understanding, though, the government would have done better if it had allayed the fears of plainlanders by recourse to a public education campaign, a matter in which the opposition has taken the field obviously because of the majoritarian implication.

A word of caution to both sides: violence snowballs of its own motion regardless of blame apportionment in our peculiarly intimidating context. It is the provocations that must now be averted.

Set Liton Free

Little Liton was arrested some three months back from the Farmgate area and has been detained at the Mirpur vagrants home since then. Both the actions were nothing but criminal, and the policemen responsible together with the authorities of the home must forthwith be prosecuted on very definite charges. Before that there must be departmental action against these people.

Liton, a primary school student at Char Jakhalia, Kotiadi on arrival in Dhaka to visit relatives, was waiting with vegetables brought from home for the hosts for his father to return from toilet. Police pounced on him. His father was moving heaven and earth, going up to even a minister with a request for Liton's release. But he continues to be in that specialised jail.

The other day we wrote in these columns to say that there are millions in Bangladesh to fit into the connotation of the word 'vagrant'. There was no point now in treating vagrancy as a crime. Liton's case beats our plea. He has not only a home and address and a school where he is a regular student but also a father who has been coming to the home everyday for three months to plead with whoever are in charge.

The welfare people are disgusted that of the girls sent to most homes are prostitutes who are not vagrants by any stretch of imagination. All right, the police are in the wrong. Why you good people detain them knowing full well you're doing wrong? Because it is a kind of jailing and only a magistrate, so charged, can release any detainee from there. Why do you run a jail, messrs welfare? And does the magistrate hold a trial there with lawyers pleading for the state and the detainee? Is there any provision for appeal?

This Augean stables will take time to be cleaned. Now is the time to ask government: release all inmates of vagrant homes within 48 hours of this counsel and make sure you fill these with persons genuinely in need of protection and help.

Meanwhile, action first must be taken against those responsible for the magistrate's post lying vacant there for months. We address our appeal direct to you, Mr Home Minister.

A Faculty Gone Awry

It might give one an impression that political leaders in this country simply do not have a faculty to come out of their psychological hang-ups, past prejudices and mindsets. Snapping out of a habit or reacting quickly even if that is only to steal a political march over the rival is not their forte. But Lutfur Rahman of Tongi seems to be quite a departure from this syndrome of politicos. Only that his quicksilver and innovative faculty has been misspent and the man himself in all likelihood is moaning and groaning for his innovative flair.

The man, as a news snippet in a leading Bengali daily informs us, led a gang of TV pickers. Posing as an inspector authorised to check TV licences Lutfur and his gang reportedly 'confiscated' 35 TV sets from a pocket of households in Tongi that seemed to have been handicapped by the twin lackings of information and authenticity. So they capitulated to Lutfur and his group's delight. But as they say you cannot cheat all the people all the time, it was perhaps too many for too long at one place. The wheel came full circle when somebody from a house challenged Lutfur and, threatened by looming pressure of angry mob, Lutfur, let the cat out saying he had nothing to do with TV authorities and that he was a mere impostor.

It was quick and innovative of Lutfur to see an opportunity to abuse, TV authorities announced of sending house to house licence inspecting parties. He deemed it easy to dupe the uninformed law-dodging people of an area but it was certainly a faculty gone awry. Will Lutfurs with their conceptual quickness and innovativeness always feature news items for the wrong cause?

I was in Pakistan when the Uttar Pradesh crisis burst on the Indian scene. Newspapers front-page pictures of violence in the state assembly hall. Since they never leave any opportunity have a go at us, one daily in Karachi had captioned the photo: 'Fighting Democracy'. Still more telling was the intelligentsia's comment: 'A dalit President has saved Hindus'.

However uncharitable it may sound, there is truth in the comment, except that the Indian polity is not Hindu by any standard. Still the bad name that the champions of Hinduism, the Bharatiya Janta Party, has given to the country may be difficult to erase. In Pakistan, the reputation of the BJP is no different from the one prevailing in India — a communal organisation, wanting to establish Hindu Raj.

And like India, people in Pakistan have believed that whatever else be the ills of the BJP, it has followed certain norms in politics. That image has been shattered. The impression that has gained ground is that the party was wearing a mask of civil behaviour and that it has come out now. The thinking both in India and Pakistan is that whatever the price, the BJP will pay it to get power. It is as greedy, as grasping and as unscrupulous as any other political party in the sub-continent.

Returning to New Delhi, I find that the BJP is not even ashamed of what it has done, something out of its character. The party leaders are blatant in their observations. In fact, the most sober argument used is: Everything is fair in love and war. Which war the party is fighting? Is it against whatever

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is left of institutions and values?

One can see that the BJP has picked up history-sheets to join the battle. Its defence is that those recruited are not regulars, but irregulars. In other words, they are not yet the BJP members. How does it matter when they are ministers in the BJP-headed government, which can play havoc with the administration and the society?

I was sad to watch a television programme where my lost, misguided friend, Atal Behari Vajpayee, defended defections in the state without showing any tinge of concern on his face. His argument was that a small boat leaving a big ship (meaning Congress) was in distress and hence sought security in joining another big ship (meaning the BJP).

In the 1600's and 1700's, there were pirates called buccaneers, who preyed upon Spanish ships. The BJP leaders have behaved like them; it was not a small boat coming to a big ship. It was an act of day-light piracy. The BJP used all power at its command — money bags, ministerships and manoeuvres — to lure members to the party fold. Vajpayee's defence is worse than the guilt.

Pramod Mahajan, the BJP secretary-general, was at least more honest. He said, again on TV, that since his party had been blamed in the past for finishing second, they had employed every method to be num-

ber one. True, but has he assessed the damage caused to the party?

The BJP has carried the taint of communalism but not of morality. In fact, many people have weighed its communalism against its clean image to infer that the scales were tilted in favour of morality. But it is a different ball game now.

This is bad enough. The worse is that the party is ready to repeat a similar exercise at the Centre. BJP chief LK Advani has said this more than once. (As many as 30 Congress Lok

24 hours, the Gujral government gave the BJP still more mileage. But the party could not retain even a bit of ground when it appointed all the 93 defectors as ministers. The BJP is now a point of ridicule.

Still I have not been able to figure out why the Gujral government passed the resolution on Kalyan Singh's dismissal in the first place. Events pieced together show the cabinet meeting was tense. The prime minister asked every minister, turn by turn, to say whether he favoured the dismissal or not.

Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav from within the cabinet and Congress president Sitaram Kesri and CPI secretary-general Harkishen Singh Surjeet from outside. But he is known to have withheld all the pressure, minus that of Congress, on the dismissal of Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar. I am not going into the merits or demerits of the case but mentioning his capacity to say 'no' when he so desires.

Under the parliamentary system of government, the cabinet is to advise and assist the prime minister, not to dictate him. The convention is that any minister who differs with the prime minister has to quit the government. At one stage, the constituent assembly was of the opinion that a minister should be removed through impeachment. But this was rejected on the plea that he or she should hold the position at the pleasure of the President, in other words, the prime minister.

The second cabinet meeting, when it reversed the earlier decision after receiving the President's advice, was also tense. This time only Mulayam Singh Yadav resisted till last. But he also gave in. Thus both resolutions, one for the imposition of President's rule and the other against it were unanimous. And both were passed without 24 hours of each other. What does it connote? Does the cabinet wilt under pressure? The second one at least had a moral ending

but was not rightly noticed because the public came to know that the issue was power politics, not anything altruistic.

The central government has several lessons to learn from UP. There was not enough transparency on what led the cabinet to recommend the dismissal. Then why the threat to dissolve the assembly when in reality Kalyan Singh was given 48 hrs to prove his majority, during which time he herded members from other parties. The sword of dissolution hanging over the heads of members came in handy to the BJP. No one wanted fresh elections. Kalyan Singh's job was made easy.

The role of state governor Romesh Bhandari is reprehensible and so is that of the state speaker. That the speaker has been the BJP member speaks volumes about his actions. Lok Sabha speaker P A Sangma's suggestion to look into the violence committed by members is an opportunity to the state speaker to rehabilitate himself. With this opening, he can reassess the entire affair and point out where the BJP or any other political party had gone wrong.

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As the Muslims of Bosnia were being annihilated, beginning April 1992, the diplomat par excellence's advice to the US Government was: 'do nothing.' The US should do nothing about 'old conflicts'. Kissinger suggested. Surprisingly, that statement echoed the sentiments of bigots and Zionists who abhorred the creation of a Muslim-majority state in the heart of Europe!

Although Kissinger had accused the late President Anwar Sadat of Egypt of having a 'carnal' relationship with power, he became an instant admirer of Sadat, when the latter signed the Camp David peace treaty with Israel in 1979. One would have expected a true man of peace to take a more active part in Rabin-Shamir-Arafat's Middle East peace process.

Henry Kissinger urged the US Government to allow the Shah of Iran, fleeing from the Iranian revolution, to enter the US for medical treatment in 1979. Both the US and Iran suffer each other's hostility to this day, because of that ill-conceived advice.

In the mid 1970s, without consulting the Congress, the legislative arm of the government, Henry Kissinger arbitrarily ruled that the US government would have no contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, until it recognized Israel. The ruling robbed the PLO of its trump card, and forced it to concede too much in return for too little. As the Palestinian uprising, 'intifada', was taking hold in the Israeli occupied territories in 1987, Kissinger advised the then Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin to break the bones of Palestinian children, 'a la South Africa.' Here was a Nobel Peace Prize winner urging Israel to emulate the repressive measures of the racist South African apartheid regime!

The guru of American popular culture art Andy Warhol once said: 'Everyone has the right to fifteen minutes.' In his extended fifteen minutes on the world stage, Dr. Henry Kissinger did some good. It is a pity that he also wished grievous harm on his enemies, and unnecessarily wounded the sensibilities of a whole lot of innocent people he did not much care about — conduct clearly unbecoming of a Nobel Peace Prize winner!

Meanwhile, the require is hatching up grandiose schemes, may be from these surplus eggs — including \$7 billion Ganga Barrage, when the waiting list for a new telephone in Dhaka city is two years, with charge for installation (Tk 16,000) being the highest in the world; and spies at the bank counters follow the drawn cash and decamp with the money in highway robbery.

Rotten eggs! (we can't say some grapes, as our local grapes were really too sour).

A Zabu Dhaka

Usefulness of opposition in real life

Sir, It is a pity that most of our people do not understand fully the usefulness of opposition in parliament. To protect our democracy, we must grasp its deeper meaning and accept its burden for the good of our common men and women.

One should remember that a kite flies against the wind. If the party in power shared views with that of opposition to avoid conflicts and misunderstanding in order to build up democratic values and discipline in politics.

The sooner, the better. Let the kite in the sky teach us to avail of the advantage.

Abul Ashraf Noor
Uttara, Dhaka

Power by Hook or Crook

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Sabha MPs have already been sounded by the BJP. Even a few days ago, he was lecturing the nation on the ethics of parliamentary system and was pointing out the depth to which the country had fallen. What he has allowed his party to do in UP beats all proportions. In comparison, Congress appears

But for Home Minister Inderjit Gupta and Industry Minister Murasoli Maran, who expressed their reluctance, every one said yes. The two also withdrew their objection ultimately. The prime minister reportedly told the cabinet that he was not certain that the President would accept the recommendation. The unanimous resolution was then forwarded to Rashtrapati Bhawan.

But why did the prime minister go along when he was not sure of President's approval? Was it part of his now familiar style of governance: to decide or not to decide. It is true that Gujral was pressured by

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The Trail that Dr. Henry Kissinger Blazed

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

He said he had never met a "Father of a Nation" and described Sheikh Mujib as a man of "immense conception." Of course, he was lying through his teeth. He was actually gloating over the monumental problems that Bangladesh and Sheikh Mujib confronted at that time, such as famine. Displaying staggering pomposity and intellectual arrogance, Kissinger believed, a la Salman Rushdie, that his critics would be too dumb to fathom the depth of his cunning and deception.

After months of negotiations with the North Vietnamese government in Paris, in January, 1973, Kissinger signed a cease-fire agreement that provided for the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam and outlined the mechanism for a permanent peace settlement between the two Vietnams. For this, Kissinger shared the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize with North Vietnamese negotiator, Le Duc, who refused the Prize.

After the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, Kissinger instituted what came to be known as 'shuttle diplomacy', to disengage the belligerents. He was instrumental in restoring diplomatic relations between Egypt and the US, severed after the 1967 Middle East War.

A prolific author, including the latest one on diplomacy, Dr. Henry Kissinger is a superstar in his field. His achievements are legendary. British pop star Gilbert O'Sullivan sang his praise in a hit song. Just how worthy is Dr. Kissinger of all these adulations?

Let's take a closer look.

There was a time in the 1970s, when Dr. Henry Kissinger held the world by the scruff of the neck. With President Richard Nixon slowly sinking into the quicksand called Watergate, and the law catching up with Vice President Spiro Agnew's penchant for accepting bribes, Secretary of

State Kissinger was the de facto President of the United States. Un-elected by the Americans to any office, Kissinger was nevertheless not bashful in exercising power. Or acting out his prejudice.

During Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971, Dr. Henry Kissinger was steadfastly opposed to Bangladesh's independence. It is common knowledge that Kissinger hated Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujib Rahman's guts, for seeking independence for Bangladesh at a most inconvenient time for Kissinger. Never a fan of Islamic nations, Kissinger nevertheless supported Pakistan to the hilt during Bangladesh's liberation war.

After all, nothing could interfere with his China policy and his quest for personal greatness. As the Pak army butchered innocent Bangladeshis, Kissinger was busy hobnobbing with Yahya Khan, and at the pretense of falling 'sick' at Peshawar, secretly traveling to Beijing in an overture to normalize US relations with China.

Long after Bangladesh's independence, Kissinger's America still had no policy on Bangladesh. Or to put it in another way, Kissinger had no time for the enormous problems Bangladesh faced in the aftermath of its birth. Adding

insult to injury, Kissinger defended Bangladesh as an 'international basket case.' Sheikh Mujib quickly retorted: 'Bangladesh is not an empty basket.' Kissinger's casting of aspersion on Bangladesh, to this day remains the ugliest public humiliation of Bangladesh by a foreign official. The slight should have made Kissinger a persona non grata in Bangladesh.

Instead, when Kissinger triumphantly visited Bangladesh in 1974, he was all condescension. He said he had never met a 'Father