

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 irresistibly 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 Khaleida Zia's speech was veritable hell-fire; 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 there 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 their forte. But Lutfur Rahman of Tongi seems to be quite a departure from this syndrome of politicians. 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 announcement 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 intelligent'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 ill 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. 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

All political parties are barking at the wrong tree when they are demanding the scrapping of Article 356, which empowers the centre to take over a state administration in the name of breakdown of the constitution. The issue is not whether the governor should have powers to dissolve the assembly but whether the political parties have any code of ethics to follow whereby the horse-trading of members is eschewed.

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 buccaniers, 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, ministries 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 CPM secretary-general Harkishan Singh Surjeet from outside. But he is known to have withstood 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 the 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 hours 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 assess the entire affair and point out where the BJP or any other political party had gone wrong.

All political parties are barking at the wrong tree when they are demanding the scrapping of Article 356, which empowers the centre to take over a state administration in the name of breakdown of the constitution. The issue is not whether the governor should have powers to dissolve the assembly but whether the political parties have any code of ethics to follow whereby the horse-trading of members is eschewed.

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 saintly.

Little does the BJP realise how much it has lost. There was a time when the party was on top of the world. The Inder Gujral government had bungled in advising the President to dissolve the UP government and the state assembly. By reversing its order in less than

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 Bhavan.

But why did the prime minister go along when he was not sure of President's approval? Was it part of his by 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 Tho, 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 Mujibur 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 Ayah Khan, and at the pretence of falling "sick" at Peshawar, secretly traveling to Beijing in an overture to normalizing 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 described Bangladesh as an "international basket case." Sheikh Mujib quickly retorted: "Bangladesh is not an empty basket." Kissinger's casting of aspersions on Bangladesh, to this day remains the ugliest public humiliation of Bangladesh by a foreign official. That slight alone 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 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.

Dr. Henry Kissinger's prejudice would be further exposed during Iran-Iraq war, beginning in 1980, when he wished both the combatants mutual destruction! Imagine, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, urging two warring nations to fight each other to death! When North Vietnam overran the South in 1975, thus uniting the two Viet-

nam and wiping out Kissinger's peace accord, Kissinger was nevertheless allowed to keep his tainted Nobel Prize. At least there he was in good company — former terrorist Menachem Begin was also a Peace Prize winner!

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!

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 telephonic in Dhaka city is two years, with charge for installation (Tk 18,000) being the highest in the world; and spies at the bank counts follow the drawn cash and decamp with the money in highway robbery.

4) Fishes are treated with coloured chemicals for maintaining artificial freshness. 5) For fattening beef cattle urea is fed to animal. Old weak and diseased cattle and goats are slaughtered here and there for beef and mutton.

6) Vegetables are moistened with oil and chemicals to increase its brightness and freshness artificially. Potatoes are treated with red dye to sell it as a superior quality.

7) For quick growing of vegetables use of fertilizers and pesticides are indiscriminate and rampant. This ultimately affects the consumer.

8) Many hotels and restaurants do not prepare and serve quality food stuff and there is lack of sanitation, cleanliness, preservation etc.

Most of the countries have the system of food administration which is generally attached with drug administration. I draw the attention of relevant authorities to take measures for ensuring food safety.

M A Jalil
372/B-Khulgaon, Dhaka

Where are the eggs?
Sir, A recent news item disclosed that about 20,000 new poultry farms since 1992 produce lakhs of extra eggs per month. Where are these surplus eggs? Yesterday I bought a half (4) for Tk 16.

Who are these new consumers at inflation estimated at 14 per cent (DS editorial, Oct 14)? Unless the price comes down to 10-12 taka for 4, the middle class and the fixed income groups cannot afford eggs for breakfast or for the school children.

Abul Ashraf Noor
Uttara, 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 of opposition on various national issues through dialogue, it is sure to create harmony and order in every aspect of national life.

In my opinion, we must match patriotic feelings 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.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Faculty of Agriculture at DU

Sir, As reported in the Press, the Dhaka University is going to open its 'Faculty of Agriculture' very soon. A good and timely move indeed. It may be mentioned here that the Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (the then Bengal Agricultural Institute), Dhaka since its establishment in 1938, had been offering (till 1964) B.Sc.B.Ag. degree course under Dhaka University. At that time, BAI was treated as the Faculty of Agriculture of Dhaka University.

Meanwhile in an agro-based country like Bangladesh, setting up of a few more agricultural universities or agriculture faculty in the general universities is very much needed in order to bring about true changes and development in the country's agricultural education system. These institutions will also help in producing more skilled and scientific manpower to work in various agri-disciplines both in private and public sectors.

Many general universities in the advanced as well as developing countries have agriculture faculties. This faculty system also reduces expenditure for agri. education because other science and arts faculties of the same university provide more effective teaching on related subjects taught in agriculture course.

Unfortunately but true, being an agricultural country,

Bangladesh has only a few higher agricultural education institutions. But if we look at our neighbouring country, India — it has altogether 33 Agricultural Universities/Agri-faculties offering under- and post-graduate education in agriculture. It may be indicated here that like Bangladesh, agriculture has been the backbone of India's economy as 31.8% contribution to domestic products of India comes from agriculture. In case of Bangladesh, agriculture contributes 35% of the GDP.

M Zahidul Haque
BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

Crying out in the wilderness

Sir, for a long time I have been thinking about writing something to give vent to my pent up feelings. The problems is where do I start from and where do I end? Let me start with the postal service.

If you are lucky you will get letters from your children abroad, written and posted in spite of their busy schedule. Well, if it is a post card (obviously cards are pretty everywhere and in innumerable envelopes) and if it reaches you, you should consider yourself the luckiest person in the world. And if you complain — I mean if you send a written complaint — I feel sorry for you. You will never get letters from your

address. This advice is not mine. Someone from the postal service smilingly suggested it. So one must write less (I shouldn't say stop) letters to one's near and dear ones. Then what is the alternative? Telephone? Well that is what I started doing. The first month's bill made me completely crazy. I didn't call my children (in USA and Europe) for more than three minutes. Each time while booking the call I repeated the 3-minute timing. Well, the bill showed five minutes for each call, and funnily there were other telephone numbers given on the bill which I was supposed to have called. I rang up the authorities concerned and complained. Prompt came the answer "computer 'tai bawlay' (computer says so).

So I guess it solved their problems. Hence, irritatingly I took a pen and a pad to write letters to my children. As my letters go, there was a big bang and the lights went off. I knew there was no alternative but to pray. I went with my driver to the nearby electricity supply office. After physical dash and push the other fellow could peep from the window. Only thing we could find out was that not only our area but also most of the places in Dhaka were under blackout. The reason for the big bang was given to us: "the transformer had become old and funky and the new transformers were of cheap quality. So the old and the new one cannot bear the load." This was the exact statement I was thunderstruck to hear this!

Talking about being thunderstruck all of a sudden it started drizzling. We subconsciously felt a bit relieved. After a little while, it was pouring and there was no electricity. Then we felt the mosquito bite. It was terrible. As everybody

knows, Dhaka — excepting a few selected areas — has become a public urinal. So with the pouring water in the drain, the nerve-wrecking smell made us completely mad. There is no drain cleaning, no spray since quite a long time.

When one goes out in the evening, some people go for a short walk (which is not safe at all, not only because of "shantirash" but also lawlessness of the rickshawpullers), one would see women with their "jharoo" in hand talking and sweeping, blowing dust to make things unbearable. Somehow, I started to write next day again but I don't know where and how to end my letter.

A Sufferer
Shonkar, Dhaka

Safe food

Sir, Safe food is indispensable for sound health. But in absence of any food administration and standard regulation there exists a complete disorder in this vital sector. Adulterated, spurious, and fake food stuff have flooded the market. Situation is more alarming in the mufassil towns and rural areas. Apart from processed food stuff crops produced by the farmers are also devoid of qualities like flavour, taste, nutrition etc. In short following are some instances how foods become unsafe for consumers.

1) Edible oil imported in bulk are often not properly refined and sometimes are adulterated with low grade oil. Acid value of coconut oil is not properly controlled.

2) Confectionery are often prepared using low grade flour, eggs and other ingredients.

3) To whiten the colour of molasses and to fry rice urea is mixed during preparation.