

Hardly Serves the Purpose

We regret the incomplete formation of the inordinately delayed Parliamentary Standing Committees. It is indeed a pity that a matter on which the plinth of parliamentary exercise so vitally rests could not be a study in authenticity and desired conclusiveness. A very delayed and compelled response to the rules of procedure of the House as it was, the outcome is evidently incomplete because it did not have the representation of the main opposition BNP and secondly because these committees being wholly composed of members of the ruling party will be responsible unto themselves. The formation of these committees, a watchdog mechanism on the ministries mooted to ensure transparency in governance, had been a thorny issue ever since it was announced that they would not be headed by government ministers. Sessions after sessions went by interspersed with BNP boycotts, yet the ruling party and the opposition with its demand for both representation and chairmanship of these committees on a proportional basis were locked in a no-go battle. Whether Jatiya Party which is sharing power with the ruling AL would be regarded as part of the opposition was also there in the controversy.

Neither seemed to realise that it was a sad commentary on parliamentarians as a body; because, after all, the electorate, irrespective of the ideological differences of the politicians, want their elected representatives to contribute to the cause of good governance unitedly and unhesitatingly.

We urge both the party in power and the opposition to come of age. We have had enough of puerile recalcitrance. It is time they buried their hatchets up to a level where they can operate in a pluralistic manner and ensure unhindered parliamentary practices. The truth about these standing committees is that they will be authentically functional only when they will register opposition representation. That option is still very much open, subject of course to dialogue and consultation between the two sides.

Tribal Repatriation

There is this solid news conveyed to us by Deputy Commissioner, Khagrachhari, Md. Ismail on his return from the Indian state of South Tripura that modalities have been finalised for the stalled tribal refugee repatriation to resume inside of a week's time — on November 21. The good timing is made all the more auspicious by the DC's expressed confidence that the process encompassing return of around 40,000 refugees to the CHT will continue unhindered till its completion by December 31. Given the surefootedness of the understanding reached with the tribal refugee leadership in India and the Tripura state government based on Bangladesh's beefed up readiness to give the returnees a satisfactory deal at home, hopes do spring steadily for a satisfactory completion of the repatriation process.

What has made a qualitative difference in the optimism level lately is the change of heart demonstrated by the tribal refugee leader Upendral Chakma who after meeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sometime ago retraced his steps from an earlier stubborn insistence on UNHCR or ICRC involvement in the repatriation process.

Another factor that has helped clinch a positive response to the repatriation agenda lay in dealing with this question on its own merit without allowing it to be muddled by ups and downs in the peace negotiations held between the NCCHT and the PCJSS. The basic vibration has reached the antenna of tribal leadership, both at home and the South Tripura refugee camps that prospects for peace and reconciliation are firmly on course for the people in the CHT.

Our congratulations to the tribal leadership, Tripura state government and Bangladesh officials on their meeting of minds to give the return of refugees to Bangladesh a good spin.

While urging them all to cooperate in implementing the decisions concerning repatriation, we are hoping that no fresh cause will either be made or given during the progress of the process.

Sea Resort Insecurity

Rape is a crime because it is violence against a human body. But it is graver than beating or even murdering as it violates human dignity. And man is man when his animal form acquires dignity and that dignity is recognised and respected. One is less of a man if one cannot recognise and respect the dignity in another.

When we report rape or discuss about it or comment on it, we submit to a kind of indignity to the victim. Conscious of the victim's misfortune and, more importantly, her dignity one can hardly comment on or discuss reports of rape crimes. But we are here forced to do exactly that as the violation of newly-wed Fatima and torture of her husband Rahmatullah are too much of a horror to pass without outraging our social sensibility.

The newly-weds went on a honeymoon trip to Cox's Bazar the other day. Nothing could be better and for a village couple it was the height of romanticism to think up Cox's Bazar for the occasion. They rented a room at a hotel on mainstreet Cox's Bazar. Rahmatullah went out to buy food and the hotel manager and four accomplices took Fatima away to another room and started gangraping her. On return the husband was locked up in his rented room. After a whole night's torture Fatima and Rahmat were rescued by police in the morning. A police inspector reportedly intervened and tried to intimidate the couple into hushing up the matter. They resisted and filed a case.

The culprits must be punished as harshly as law permits. Together with them the police officer must be punished and restrained forthwith, if the allegation against him is proved. With him there twirling his baton, the progress of the case cannot perhaps be ensured.

This incident wouldn't earn Cox's Bazar the reputation it needs to attract tourists, specially home tourists. Once the bad name would spread, the prospect of this town as a resort will be doomed. It is time the townspeople woke up to the danger of this and take steps to restore the place to the old-time security it offered to its residents and new arrivals. It is such a small society there that vigilance against such crime should not pose any big problem.

THE island of Crete belonging to Greece in the Aegean has been the theatre of a Balkan Summit. Host Greece had invited all the countries of the Balkans. Given the mistrust and downright animosity that characterizes the relations between the Balkan states, it was an achievement to stage this conference.

Of special interest to Turkey for more than one reason was the forum it provided to hold bilateral talks with her neighbour Greece when relations are at a delicate stage. Accusations and counter accusations of spoiling the climate for reasonable relations have been flying thick and fast. Provocative military exercises between Greece and Cyprus on the one hand and Turkey and Turkish Cyprus on the other have been staged alongside the meetings between Turkish Premier Mesut Yilmaz and Greek Premier Costas Simitis.

From the accounts appearing in the media the Turkish side did its utmost not to build high expectations. Yet the bilateral talks seem to have gone surprisingly well. The two Prime Ministers are reported to have agreed to 1) reduce tension in the Aegean, 2) Madrid agreement which underlined the need for preparation for the ground for better understanding will be brought to life and the Committee of Wise Men will be brought into

TURCO-GREEK SUMMIT Will it Pave Way for Turkish Entry into EU?

Accepting Turkey for eventual membership would mean that EU will cease to be a Christian club. Are the bigwigs of the EU ready for it?

action, and 3) Prime Minister Simitis accepted the invitation to visit Turkey. One sticking point between Turkey and Greece namely a reference to arbitration of the International Court of Justice at the Hague, has been successfully resolved and Turkey has agreed to the Greek proposal. This relates to the Continental Shelf and the boundaries in the Aegean.

Indeed one of the problems between Greece and Turkey is the existence of Hundreds of islands close to the borders of each other. Many of these islands are not inhabited and there has been no sign of oil or gas. Another interesting dimension was that each Prime Minister will appoint a personal representative who will be the 'safe channel' between the two Prime Ministers. Talking to the press shortly after the Conference came to a close, Yilmaz stated that he was surprised to find the lack of information among his Greek counterparts.

The Balkan Summit brought together such controversial personalities like Slovenian Milosevic of Yugoslavia, Albanian Premier Fatos Nano, whose countries are at odds over Yugoslavia's ethnically flammable region of Kosovo.

Others participating in the Summit were the leaders of Bosnia, Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia.

The Turco-Greek Summit was meticulously prepared although the coverage in the media is low key. Nearly a fortnight ago a businessmen's delegation led by the baron of Turkish business community Koc (Koch) along with a large contingent from the trade and industry, media personalities and artists made a successful visit to Salonika in Greece, the birthplace of founder of modern Turkey Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The delegation was received with great warmth by the Greeks of Salonika and had an audience with the Prime Minister.

The question which is uppermost on everybody's mind is, 'Will the Turco-Greek Summit of Crete pave the way for Turkey's entry into the European Union?' Talking to

Turkish reporters Prime Minister Simitis is reported to have stated 'Our position is clear. We desire cooperation. We are aware that close cooperation between EU and Turkey is attainable and we do not wish to bar Ankara from the EU. The fact is that Turkey has an aggressive foreign policy. Any country that wishes to cooperate with the EU must accept the European order and

is the prospect of vast enlargement of EU by the end of the year. A Summit is due to be held in Luxembourg before the end of the year, before the rotating presidency moves to London. Britain is reported to have floated the idea of starting negotiations with Cyprus with the presence of Turkish Northern Cyprus and start off negotiations with Turkey for prospective membership of EU. In other words Britain dangles the carrot of EU membership before Turkey to dissuade her from the extreme step of full integration with Northern Cyprus.

She has been at it since its birth in the fifties. After many tortuous process of negotiations she finally decided to join the Customs Union thereby opening her gates to the products from all over the world and particularly the countries of the European Union. She has paid heavy price in tariff competition and yet she has failed so far to enter the list of countries with which EU will start negotiations for eventual membership. Now that negotiations are due to start with a large number of countries of Central Europe including Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia and

Estonia, Turkey has carried on an energetic campaign into the most important capitals of EU. Prime Minister Yilmaz has visited Germany and France and is due to visit Britain shortly. Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit has visited the Scandinavian countries.

The EU appears to come to the end of her arguments against including Turkey in the list of countries that will make the grade by the year end. From the periphery of Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union Turkey has emerged on centre stage of a vastly expanded Europe. Her special ethnic, religious and linguistic ties with a large number of countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia, most of them endowed with enormous wealth in natural resources specially oil and gas, gives her a special place in Europe. EU, hungry for new markets cannot afford to ignore Turkey at the doorstep of a newly emerged world.

EU has been petrified by the thought of 65 million Turks invading their work places. Already a sizable number of workers including more than two million Turks in Germany settled for nearly half a century cause social tension. Accepting Turkey for eventual membership would mean that EU will cease to be a Christian club. Are the bigwigs of the EU ready for it?

The Horizon This Week Arshad-uz Zaman

In the same interview Prime Minister Simitis was reported to be pessimistic about a solution of the Cyprus problem. Indeed the chasm between the Greek position and the Turkish position has widened. Whereas EU seems ready to start talks on membership of Cyprus minus Turkish Northern Cyprus, Turkey has threatened further integration of the one third Turkish Cyprus held by her.

Looming large on the horizon

Jain Commission's Report and Threat to UF Government in India

by Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

What is really there about DMK in Justice MC Jain's report about Rajiv killing remains to be seen. But if the DMK is indicted, the UF government and its supporter Congress will have to play their roles and this may shake the Indian government...

THE influential regional party in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu — the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), must have been disturbed for two bad and sad news. First, it was reported that the Jain Commission investigating the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Perampudur constituency in the Tamil Nadu in 1991 in its final report made certain adverse remarks about the DMK and its leader M Karunanidhi about the killing of the Indian leader.

Some reports say that such comments and observations by the commission go to the extent of not only suspecting but even linking the regional party and its leader to the murder of Mr Gandhi. Obviously, this has sent a tremor through the spines of the federal United Front (UF) government headed by Prime Minister Indira Kumar Gujral since the DMK is not only a constituent of the 15-party coalition, but an important partner of the combination. The Congress of late Rajiv Gandhi, whose support the UF government has come to power and remains in the saddle despite being a minority government, predictably, is angered by the role of the DMK and its leader in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination as reported to have been found in the report of the Jain commission.

Immediately, the Congress asked for an explanation from the leader of the UF government, Prime Minister Mr Gujral, and pressure mounted on the prime minister to abandon the DMK from the UF government. Otherwise, the Congress had indicated, it might withdraw its support from the government which will naturally

lead to the collapse of the Gujral government, because the UF is fully dependent on Congress support for its survival at the Centre. The second news has been sadder for the DMK, as its senior leader, who represented the party in the central government in the form of a state minister for defence was killed in a helicopter accident in the Arunachal Pradesh, near the Chinese border. The minister, Mr N V Somu, was to address the troops along the difficult terrain and the chopper in which he was travelling crashed with a Major General of the Army and some others including the two pilots presumably due to poor visibility. Mr Somu was one of the persons from the DMK who helped party's bid to regain power in the Tamil Nadu and also share power at the Centre by becoming a partner of the United Front.

The two news sent shock waves through the DMK headquarters in Madras, the state capital. While the second news is sadder, as it involves the sudden death of a senior party leader, the first news is evidently much more disturbing and fraught with far-reaching consequences in the national politics. Besides, this could also damage the political career of the veteran leader of the Tamil Nadu state Mr Karunanidhi, whose party staged a comeback to power through the last general elections in the state after remaining in the cold for several years. The report of the

Jain Commission had all the potentials to drive a wedge between the DMK and most of its partners in the UF coalition and this may eventually threaten the existence of the UF as a coalition and also the government. The Congress which is backing this government cannot relish a situation when the DMK remains in a government supported by the Congress if the observation of the Jain Commission are true.

One good thing that may give some comfort to the DMK and the UF for the time-being is that the report is yet to be made public and whatever is trickling in the press is essentially leaks out although it is plausible that such reports in the press cannot be without any base. The storm that was sparked off by the report of the Jain Commission linking the DMK in some ways to Rajiv Gandhi's assassination has somewhat been tackled by the government, saying that what is really contained in the report could only be known after it is formally placed in the Parliament. The government said it would be placed in the Parliament when the House meets on November 19. But the Congress has not relented and said it would wait only few days and then chart its course of action if the DMK is really found as responsible in any way or conniving the Rajiv killing conspiracy. The Congress gave a breathing space to the UF government but only after a long meeting between its president

Mr Sitaram Kesri and Prime Minister Mr Gujral.

Rajiv Gandhi was killed by a suicide woman bomber on 21st May, 1991 while campaigning in Tamil Nadu before the national and state elections. He was then not in power but was expected to stage a return to power. Mr Gandhi, during his prime ministership took the decision to send Indian troops to neighbouring Sri Lanka for helping the Sri Lankan army to crush the 'Tamil Eelam' movement — seeking a separate state in the northern area of the country comprising the overwhelmingly Tamil inhabited people who had originally come from Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Most of the Sri Lankans are Sinhalese and Buddhists while the Tamils are generally Hindus.

The Sri Lankan Tamils have strong cultural and religious bonds with the Indian Tamils in the Tamil Nadu and expectedly, the Tamil Nadu state has enormous goodwill for the fellow Tamils' movement in Sri Lanka. It was well-known that the Tamils from Sri Lanka used to cross the strait and seek sanctuary in the Tamil Nadu whenever they were in hot pursuit by the Lankan authorities. There are several political parties in Tamil Nadu but the DMK and its rival ADMK — both seeking support on the Tamil identity as a regional party — maintained and may still be keeping close links with the Tamil militants from Sri Lanka.

The DMK is known to be more aggressive in this regard compared to ADMK whose leader is former film actress and former chief minister Ms Jayalalitha. At one stage, most of the Indian political parties had support for the Tamil agitation to varying degrees but later many backed out due to various reasons.

When Congress was in power, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi after a deal with Sri Lankan President Junius Jayawardene sent Indian peacekeeping force to Sri Lanka to help the island state to maintain its stability and territorial integrity. Rajiv Gandhi was also annoyed with the Tamil militant supremo Prabhakaran — who had at that time began conducting himself as a powerful statesman and even at times ignored advice of Rajiv Gandhi — the Indian Prime Minister. The despatch of the Indian troops was not taken kindly by Mr Prabhakaran and both sides lost huge people in the fighting that followed. More than 11,000 Indian troops were reportedly killed in Sri Lanka before they left the embattled country. However, the Colombo government expressed gratefulness to New Delhi for the assistance to crush separatists. The Tamils have not been destroyed but certainly weakened by the Indian involvement, and the movement now appears to be somewhat on the wane due to Lankan Army offensive.

The DMK and other Tamil sympathisers in India then

sought to distance themselves from the Tamils at least outwardly when it involved Indian army against them. The bloodbath that was created against India and more particularly against Mr Rajiv Gandhi ultimately found expression in the killing of the youthful Indian leader by a Tamil suicide bomber. The Tamil militants had made it clear that they would take on Mr Gandhi whenever they got a chance for his 'assistance to the Sri Lankan government'.

The elections that followed Rajiv's death were heavily in favour of the Congress and its allies, mainly for the sympathy generated by his death. The DMK had failed to secure a single seat of the total 39 Lok Sabha seats in the state. Because it was suspected as close to the killers of Rajiv. But as time passed by, the elections early last year wiped out Congress and its allies from Tamil Nadu and brought back DMK and its allies and Mr Karunanidhi became the Chief Minister. The Tamil Manlio Congress of former Congress general secretary G K Mooppanar, who broke away from the main Congress before the elections, allied with DMK and earned rich results in the polls.

As such, the DMK is an important ally and partner of the present UF government. What is really there about DMK in Justice MC Jain's report about Rajiv killing remains to be seen.

But if the DMK is indicted, the UF government and its supporter Congress will have to play their roles and this may shake the Indian government unless handled with extraordinary skill and dexterity by the key players of the political spectrum.

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.

Torture on women

Sir, The recent reports about young women being brutally butchered almost everywhere in the country call for immediate action. No crime can be deterred by just wishful thinking and press reports and so-called 'rigorous' police investigation. It is time the whole nation rises as one and raises its voice and strength against anyone daring to demand dowry and repressing married women and their guardians. Unless we can take positive actions, aimed at just crushing the criminals literally and not stalling by shalish and so-called trials, we will fail to exist as and call ourselves a civilised nation.

Recent reports indicate that young married women are being treated just as sacrificial animals who can be butchered with impunity. In many cases, as reports have it, the police either remain nonchalant, or go after the crime is committed and then either the police or the courts let the criminals. Do we have to reconfirm that the conscience of the entire society is against any trust for the police and the courts where no innocent person can get justice although notorious criminals can go scot-free? Amnesty International as well as many other organisations have expressed their absolute non-confidence in this regard. After Sheema murder case and what happened subsequently, no one believes that there could be justice at least for the helpless.

Then what is use of having an army of law and order agencies and the legal system? It's time we raise our voices clear and high and call a spade and spade, if we don't really choose

moral self-destruction as the only option. Where are our so-called intelligentsia, the social elite and the authorities? Have they sold the society out to the criminals, the extortionists and muggers? What if the people do their own justice and not believe in any authority? We don't want to go back to the law of the jungle but what is the alternate option?

We want the authorities to prove that they exist.

F Rahman 15, Fakirpool, Dhaka

Woes of an HBFC borrower

Sir, While taking the cue from the letter of Mr Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury published in this column on 9th November 1997, I am prompted to express my feelings and predicament as well.

Mr Chowdhury's letter is quite elaborate and factual and touches all relevant facets. It is an irony that an honest borrower who religiously pays his instalments every month ends up with a balance which is more than the amount borrowed despite regular payments.

I also happen to be an aggrieved borrower, whereby an amount of Tk 15 lakh became Tk 16 lakh after repaying Tk 3.8 lakh as instalments over a period since due date for payment started from May 1995. This is strange, but true. The very essence of the principle of simple interest seems to be defeated and overlooks the core concept of people's welfare. The worst sufferers are the poor-salaried persons who have to

trod the rough loan and instalment path to eke out a small shelter for the future.

After all, the HBFC is a welfare-oriented organisation as opposed to any other loan-giving agency or bank whose the ultimate motive is profit-making. Understandably, HBFC is not peddling its product (the loan) for profit.

A Borrower Dhaka

Separation of Judiciary from Executive

Sir, Among the commitments made by Awami League to the nation before the election, prominent was the Separation of Judiciary from the Executive. Earlier this year, the government, in order to fulfil its commitment, drafted a bill in this regard and the same was sent to the Bangladesh Bar Council seeking its suggestion which was forthwith. For the reasons best known to the government the draft bill has gone into oblivion. As a result, doubts and mistrusts are raising in the minds of the people about the government's sincerity towards enactment of the bill.

Our Constitution provides in Article 22 that 'That State shall ensure the separation of the Judiciary from the executive organs of the State'. In line with the above Article Mr Salauddin Yusuf, an Awami League MP, tabled in the 5th Parliament a bill on separating judiciary from the executive which was turned down by the then treasury bench.

The independence of judiciary for effective and sustained rule of law is the prerequisite without which a democratic society cannot achieve its goal. Effective justice cannot be delivered without judicial reform, strengthening institutional ar-

rangements and improving the present judicial system — which is a reality and pressing priority for our country.

I would urge our Hon'ble Prime Minister to present the nation her New Year's Gift by enacting the legislation which will, I am sure, make a bright history for our nation.

Md Shah Jahan Dhaka

What about BTV?

Sir, It is really surprising that in 'The Daily Star TV Guide', BTV's programme is often absent. Maybe the programmes telecast by BTV sometimes are not worth watching. That does not mean the BTV schedules cannot be printed.

Nur Jahan East Nastrabad, Chittagong

Princess Diana and Mother Teresa

Sir, As I read Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed's 'Letter from America' in The Daily Star on Oct 11, 1997 on 'Time to Put Princess Diana and Mother Teresa's Deaths in Perspective', I felt a bit uneasy about some of the views he had expressed.

First of all, I don't see any reason to compare Princess Diana with Mother Teresa. One was royalty and the other was a nun. So, when I read Mr Abul Mohsin's letter praising Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed (DS Oct 31, '97), I thought I had to express my own feelings.

Dr Ahmed says that Princess Diana's personal life with several outside-the-marriage-romances left much to be desired. Why? Weren't they all consenting adults? So, why should we poke into business which is not our concern? Perhaps Princess Diana should have stuck to her

unhappy marriage, with a husband who was cheating on her. But privately she was in despair over her disintegrating marriage and a husband whose affections still belonged to another woman and who was envious of her fame.

And about Diana's brother, Earl Spencer taking the royal family to task, and for which Dr Ahmed thought 'it was all in such poor taste', well would he be happy if Diana remained silent, because as far as Queen Elizabeth was concerned, Diana's duty was to remain silent accepting with dignity the traditions of royalty which have long sanctioned male infidelity. The wife's reward was in the privileges and celebrity royalty offered. But Diana was a modern woman with romantic notions about her marriage. She fought back.

Mother Teresa was a Roman Catholic nun and as she had taken the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, so for her to work with the poor was part of her religious duty. Of course, what Mother Teresa did was much more than the ordinary, and for that she is a saint and will surely be canonised by the Church.

But Princess Diana was royalty and she could have mingled only with the rich and the royals. But she had a feeling for the poor which was out of the ordinary. No one could have faulted her if she didn't have that feeling. So, that's the difference between a person taking a vow and another doing it on her own free will.

At the end, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed wrote that 'hundred years from now, whereas Princess Diana will be a footnote in history, Mother Teresa's halo will continue to glow ever brighter'. Perhaps, because Mother Teresa will have been canonised by then and will be saint, but perhaps Princess Diana's name will also remain as a person who helped change people's opinions about land mines.

She campaigned long and hard towards the banning of anti-personnel landmines, so much so that the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and its coordinator Jody Williams were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize this year. And for that, Princess Diana would surely have been very happy. For this I also thank the short letter sent by e-mail by an anti-landmines supporter (DS Oct 24).

I conclusion, I would ask Dr Ahmed to be a bit more charitable to Princess Diana as he rightly is to Mother Teresa.

Jerry Dhaka

VAT network

Sir, Its a positive step of government to increase its VAT network so that it would support govt's income and help in turn its expenditure. All restaurants and fast food shops are liable to pay VAT according to their turnover. The amount of VAT is decided on sales receipt as that's the only proof of total sales which income tax people can rely on. In practice truth is far behind somewhere as most of the customers don't bother to collect sales receipt being unaware or without feeling an urgency.

As a result, 90 per cent sales take place consequent government is deprived of millions of Taka in revenue. What govt can do in return or to correct this faulty system is to decide VAT on monthly average turnover, number of employees employed and square feet of shop premise. The department concerned may also go for campaign on TV, radio and newspapers for creating public awareness, or else a certain percentage of sales take the advantage of loop holes in the new system implemented a trial and error basis.

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