

Haemorrhage in Pakistan

Democracy in Pakistan seems unsafe today not because of any direct threat of a military putsch but in the hands of those who are expected to be its keepers. This is a tragedy unfolding in Pakistan that we find ourselves hard-put to accept. What is the worst part of the unceasing episode is their failure to rise above past rancours. The way in which they seemed hell-bent upon settling their old scores despite gracious climbdowns by the PM at an earlier stage, regardless of the misfortune all this is bringing along to the Pakistani people, has albeit left us completely dumbfounded. Incredible is also the scant regard shown to the likely world public opinion on such endless bickering undermining the institutions they represent.

Were these purely institutional assertions in matters of principle to uphold the jurisdictional rights over each other, one could have discerned at least a semblance of logic behind the antics. On contrary, they smack of personality clashes fed on personal umbrages taken of each other's moves and utterances. The President, Prime Minister and Chief Justice have been publicly reprimanding one another from such high pedestals that one wished with the Pakistani brethren that they had done so, if they at all had to, in a closetted manner through letters. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif went over the national TV to accuse President Leghari and Chief Justice Shah of conspiring against him. The president and chief justice have not minced words in publicly grilling the PM. Even the countervailing circumstances were not taken into consideration by the CJ to soften his attitude towards the PM after he actually responded to the Supreme Court's summons and expressed his regrets personally over misgivings caused by his comment on the CJ's suspension of the article on parliamentary defection.

The flurry of unilateral cancellation and suspension of each other's acts has perhaps no parallel in the constitutional histories of other countries. The chief justice suspended three laws passed by the parliament, President Leghari declined to give assent to a bill that went through the two houses of Parliament and the Supreme Court became mutinous against the chief justice himself. It is not merely democracy but even the statecraft that appears to be in danger. Let the collective good sense prevail in Pakistan.

Whose Purpose it Serves?

Yet another hartal. And once again the business leaders have registered their anxiety at this changeless pattern of frequent hartals. The question that should bother one is: does the country only belong to the businessmen? Don't the politicians need to think about the economy and the future of the country? It is sheer irony that AL and BNP who seem to have no problems in sharing the political belief that hartal is the most effective political tool to oppose and discomfit the government of the day find it so difficult to accept each other's political existence.

The series of violent clashes in the recent times which accounted for no less than seven deaths in less than a week's time amply shows what a blood thirsty psychology is at work in the activities of both AL and BNP. They seem to be out to efface each other. We are alarmed because this trend is spreading across the country at a frightening pace. Two days of violence saw seven people killed in Chittagong. Yesterday a five-hour long gunbattle between Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal cadres kept the port town Narayanganj rocking through the day. Where are we going? Is this a sign of civil society? Do the smug politicians have any idea what a recipe for destruction they have created only to do justice to their pettiness, ego and standpattism? For the inordinately long period over which they have shown their insensitivity it is clear they don't give a damn about the welfare of the people and the image of the country. What about their own future and their activists? Is the AL or BNP any better off for this sick streak of mind, this frictional blood letting trend of politics? Well, their leaderships seem to think so otherwise they would have abandoned these suicidal methods in the name of politics and opposition long ago. But this mindset is going to cost them dear, we can assure them.

AIDS and Us

If there is any single threat that looms large over all of man's achievement at this point of time it is no doubt the killer disease called Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Yesterday was world AIDS day—mankind's undesirable and panicky remembrance of the scourge's nightmarish presence. Should the AIDS break out in epidemic proportions, which the health experts consider as a very much on-the-cards reality, we along with other poor developing countries will be among the worst affected simply because of our larger population and greater ignorance.

The focus of this year's AIDS day was on children. It is assumed that one million children under the age of 15 are suspected to have had the HIV virus in the world now. That should be enough to drive the smugness we seem to have because we have such a big young population. Being underprivileged in every sense and caught in a relentless struggle with poverty our children are more vulnerable to the infection of the HIV virus than their counterparts elsewhere. Our problem is further complicated by the fact that we have been so chronically unable to see children's issue at the centre of all our activities. Every community of the society ranging from politicians to the ordinary individual has been guilty of this crime.

The government has formulated an AIDS policy but the awareness about the scourge is still minimal. Honestly it lacks seriousness and direction. We urge the government to live up to the spirit of this year's world AIDS day and take the children's issue seriously in its fight against AIDS. It should whip up its social welfare department into some sort of coordinated activity it has not shown so far. Let it, in tandem with the Health Department and the various non-governmental and voluntary organisations, give a real boost to the campaign against AIDS.

THE world has many fun places, full of ridiculous social and political norms. Such places are ideal playgrounds for PhD thesis writers. They have no dearth of subjects. Starting with no-work-days (similar to hartals in Bangladesh) and ending with near suicide rides in three-wheelers (similar to rickshaws in Bangladesh)—there is no end to interesting issues for thesis writers. They come in droves every year—dry months are the best.

No work is a wonderful way of life in Arcadia. Popularly known as full stop days but later on, there was a slight change of spelling and no-work-days are now called fool's stop days. In order to generate a fool's stop day, the prime mover has to be a big political issue. However, over the years, frequency of fool's stop days has ensured that such big political causes need not be genuine. Propaganda is the key; true or false, nobody bothers. After all, Arcadia, as the name implies, is a potentially rich country. Not only its land is fertile; there are plenty of resources underneath that land and on top. Millions of Arcadians, in particular, organised political thugs and their brain trust, although made from the scum of the earth, are rare specimen of human beings. The Arcadia Tourist Board is seriously considering to create a political zoo—as a unique attraction

which no other country can match.

In Singapore, there is an animal zoo which is built on a unique concept. One can visit the zoo only at night time because in majority of cases, animals remain awake and active at night. They tend to rest and sleep during day-light hours. A hartal-ridden society should also try to learn from clever animals. If there are too many hartals, it would be better to pull the curtains and sleep during the day and, like animals, become active and alive when it is dark. In Arcadia, the citizens have spontaneously decided to go the animal way. Office hours have been changed: from 2 to 10 pm or 6 pm to 2 am—depending on the timings of the fool's stop day.

Arcadians are using up their energy resources at a faster rate. However, the reversed patterns of life in Arcadia may also be insignificant innovative developments. In the forests, there is no light; animals remain active in spite of darkness since they have radar eyes, bionic ears and a tremendous capacity to smell things from a distance. Eventually, the Arcadians feel, their night-time activism would also enable them to acquire rare instincts which

are now in the domain of animals only. For example, children in the schools at night would be able to play in the dark fields. A special type of radar glasses are being developed by Arcadian scientists for night time vision which may benefit the thieves as well. But there are other inventions under development—all based on great lessons from the kingdom of animals.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

Entry of any trespasser in private homes may immediately cause an alarm to ring so that thieves can be apprehended by members of private police companies who take the law in their own hands. It is strange but true that in Arcadia, the public police force is not considered efficient and reliable. Hence security services have been largely privatised and private police companies have devised their own mechanisms (torture included) to sort out the delinquents.

Otherwise, presence of the

Government of Arcadia is overwhelming. Newspapers carry screaming headlines about achievements of the government. Big projects are under implementation and their manifestations are everywhere. In the capital city, Archdoom, project vehicles are causing enormous traffic jams; new offices and jobs are getting created on a daily basis and expatriate advisers and consultants

fill in the airlines as well as five star hotels. Arcadians are very polite to foreigners. They feel proud that such "highly qualified" people have come from far-off lands to help them develop and to assist them prosper. However, little did they know that a university drop-out became the Head of a UN agency in Arcadia and a house painter got the job of architect consultant—funded out of foreign assistance.

However, let us leave the foreigners aside. All praise be to Arcadians who developed such wonderful means to deal with the crisis of the day and the first and foremost crisis is how to make a living. There are so many people and so few jobs. To face this immense problem, the capital city, Archdoom, has developed the most labour-intensive retail trading and transport system of the world. All pavements and any other vacant roadside space are all occupied by hawkers of all types. In addition, thousands of hawkers are on the move and carrying their goods as head loads, throughout the capital city of Arcadia. From tiger's milk to tooth paste—you can buy anything and everything from the hawkers of Archdoom.

Second is the role of three-wheelers as the major means of intra-urban transportation. Also, frequent fool's stop days have enhanced the importance of three-wheelers since they are allowed to ply on those days. Hawkers and pullers of three-wheelers constitute at least 20 per cent of the working population of Archdoom.

There are new forms of employment which have come on stream in the recent past. Arcadians have a real passion for politics and its manifestations are everywhere. Most im-

portant, however, is its employment effect. Streets of Archdoom often get flooded with professional agitators; others with microphones go on delivering impromptu speeches in support of their political cause; while others plaster the walls with posters or political slogans. It is almost a replay of the great Athenian democracy, Arcadia-style, since exercise of democratic rights is so virulently pursued out in the open and at all possible time.

Unfortunately, in Arcadia, democracy has become the domain of the pervers. It tends to become no-work days and no school days here. Politics is dragged out of the Parliament building and thrown as garbage into the streets. Innocent citizens get killed and politicians feel so satisfied with all their misdeeds. It is hell let loose and ordinary citizens must rise up against it.

And at last, things are going to change. Days of hyper politics are going to be over since citizens of Arcadia have decided to become night birds. The fool's stop days are going to be beaten at last. If politicians decide in favour of fool's stop nights—so much the better. People of Arcadia would immediately revert back to the normal day time work and save a great deal of energy at the same time. After all, there is always a silver lining in the dark clouds. People of Arcadia strongly believe in it.

Politically Loaded Report

On November 28 Prime Minister I K Gujral resigned as Congress withdrew its support for his coalition. It demanded the United Front drop the Dravida Progressive Party, a coalition partner, accused of supporting the suspected assassins of Rajiv Gandhi. But the United Front refused to comply with the Congress demand.

WITHIN a few months of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, a book entitled, *The Assassination*, appeared in the market. It sold like hot butter. The book fictionised, reconstructed the events leading up to Rajiv Gandhi's killing. Although the names used were fictitious yet the personalities were recognisable. The excerpts I have seen in the press on the interim Jain Commission report tell far less about the assassination than the book did.

The book opens with the killing of Olaf Palme of Sweden, brings in godman Chandraswami and gives more space to Rajiv's murder. It is a coherent and plausible account. The Jain Commission report has told nothing new. There are no disclosures. A regular reader of newspapers would have found Justice Jain's observations familiar. But for his own obiter dicta, laced with political rhetoric, there is nothing new.

Surprisingly, the burden of Jain's report is that there was a security lapse. He did not have a labourer at the point of murder. Some people somewhere plan it. No government machinery all over the world has ever been able to give adequate protection to stall such dastardly acts. US President John F Kennedy was shot dead despite elaborate arrangements. Punjab chief minister Beant Singh was killed when the mighty K P S Gill was the state Director General of Police.

What Jain had to assess was whether under the Special Protection Group (SPG) Act, covering former prime ministers, Rajiv Gandhi was given the type of security that the act had laid down. Instead of that, Jain makes certain assumptions,

imputes motives to V P Singh and underlines a Chandraswami's negligence. Both were prime ministers long before Rajiv's assassination. What the hon'ble judge is suggesting is that the two allowed the violent end of Rajiv Gandhi to take place because they had failed to defeat him politically. The judge writes: "A very serious question which requires consideration by the Commission is whether V P Singh was actuated by malice, bias or antipathy in not providing of such nature and level as would have protected Rajiv Gandhi..." Is Jain justified to make such observations which are loaded, unsupported by any evidence, and so much motivated? The paragon of justice adds in the same vein: "The nature and quality of security needed under the circumstances prevailing under Chandraswami's time was not provided."

A government goes by the intelligence reports to assess circumstances and deploys security personnel accordingly. In Rajiv's case more men were posted than the SGP Act provided. Chandraswami, then prime minister, reportedly told Rajiv Gandhi more than once that he should be careful because the government repeatedly received reports on the threat to his life. Rajiv ignored the warnings.

But what "nature and level" Jain has in mind? No security assessment is adequate if the assailants are willing to commit hara-kiri. In Rajiv's case, a woman laced with bomb em-

braced him. How could have any level of security saved him? Indira Gandhi had all the security but did not survive the bullets, which her own bodyguards showered on her. Nowhere in the extract have I seen Jain addressing himself the question whether the umbrella of security provided was there or not. Finding that he could not find fault on this score and wanting

documentary proof. He could not have invented one. "Can a member of parliament be allowed to speak if he likes in total disregard of the truth," says Jain. As a general statement I agree with him. But what is the truth. Should Jain's innuendoes be considered the truth?

That the DMK was close to the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in Sri Lanka is

nothing new. But that was when Indira Gandhi, Rajiv's mother, had blessed the LTTE pogrom from Tamil Nadu against Sri Lanka. She trained and armed the LTTE cadre. She also provided shelter on Indian soil when the Lankans, forces chased the LTTE militants in retaliation. The Tamil Nadu chief minister M Karunanidhi was only a conduit; Mrs Gandhi was the supplier. When Jain talks about "the perpetration of the general political trend of indulging the Tamil militants on

Indian soil and tolerance of their wide-ranging criminal and anti-national activities," he is recalling the days of Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. The latter also met V Prabhakaran, LTTE chief in New Delhi. During Karunanidhi's chief ministership, Rajiv visited Tamil Nadu many a time without fear. Nor did IB or RAW ever tell him not to tour the state because of the chief minister's "animosity" or "his links with the LTTE."

On the other hand, I recall the conversation I had with Karunanidhi in 1991 after Rajiv's assassination. A few months earlier, when I was India's envoy in London, Sri Lankan High Commissioner D S Attygalle had met me and sought the good offices of Karunanidhi to help sort out the Tamil problem. Karunanidhi was very sympathetic to his not-so-brotherly people, but in their ways and manner, in their approach, he had not even an iota of sympathy for them and did not want to have anything to do with the organisation.

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Tamil militants during the operation of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). There were complaints to New Delhi that the details of strategy were available to the LTTE beforehand and the IPKF suspected RAW's hand behind the leakage.

I wish Jain had remained within the environs of law. Judges should avoid populism. His picture, with Prabhu Chawla, an enterprising journalist, who scooped the report the two hold the report in the picture published in a weekly—brings no credit to Jain or the judiciary. For Jain to say that his report will have political implications is nothing but politics. Of course, there will be repercussions—the effect on the political scene can already be seen—because he has tried to prove that some constituents of the United Front, particularly the DMK and some leaders had a hand in building such an atmosphere where Rajiv Gandhi's killing was natural.

Justice Verma, now the Chief Justice of India, who went into the assassination, held the Tamil Nadu police and local Congress responsible for the lapse. But Jain had to cast aspersions on the non-Congress leaders. He is not a report but a political treatise. Congress is unnecessarily agitated. It should have treated the report with the contempt it deserves. It should be consigned to the nearest dustbin.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

to be a messiah to some. Jain left the field of fact and strayed to fiction. Even a newspaper commentator is more circumspect in his observations.

Jain says without any hesitation: "It appears that V P Singh, only extends lip sympathy when he says that he has the highest safeguard for the Gandhi family..." How is this remark relevant unless he is suggesting that V P Singh was a party to the conspiracy. Again Jain accuses Finance Minister P Chidambaram going "a little mild and soft in his deposition as compared to the contents of his speech" in parliament on the proclamation of President's rule in Tamil Nadu. This observation, too, is not justified when Chidambaram said before the Commission that he adhered to his speech. His evidence was 'direct' based on what he had heard or known. He had no

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OPINION

Global Financial Turmoil

Dr F H Choudhury

Recent financial crises engulfing most of the tiger economies of Asia is bound to cast long shadow on the world economy for some time to come. The first seed of economic collapse was sown in Thailand, followed by stock market crashes in Malaysia, Indonesia and Hong Kong. The recent turbulence in Japan has practically shaken the economic foundation of the stable economies of the world.

Although it is difficult to assess, at this stage, their long-term effect, it is reasonable to assume that its reverberation will continue to be felt worldwide for some time to come. New York, London and Tokyo stock exchanges react to each other in a domino effect in relation to economic activity, and this global interdependence of the leading economies is a fact of life. Often one finds no discernible cause for them so to react.

Cause of Stock Market Fall: Considerable depreciation in the stock market values of the Asian economies, the latest victims of which are South Korea and Japan, has resulted from the soaring values of their property-led equities. It was only a matter of time that the stock markets corrected itself such high exposure of property-

based equities in the economies of Pacific basin.

Within a matter of weeks, the market has almost returned to normality leaving a nasty taste in its wake. As these economies were recovering from their shocks, failures of major Japanese banks have complicated the economic picture. Although quick action taken by the IMF with huge cash injection into these faltering economies have nursed these economies to health, some of these countries will feel obliged to re-think their economic strategies in order to avoid the repetition of such turbulence.

Effect of Recent Turmoil on American Economy: Although America is trying to stand tall, and President Clinton is endeavouring in his goal to spread his free trade gospel in the Asia Pacific region now, the attendant countries have learnt to accept his message of free trade with a pinch of salt having noticed his limited capacity in his being able to spread his free trade concessions evenly and equitably to the member-countries. The President is hamstrung by his Congress and his recent success with the Latin American free trade zone has

not been rewarded with equal success in the Asia-Pacific region, which is a pity.

America's goldie lock economy has produced sustained economic growth during the entire tenure of Clinton's presidency, although beyond its secure borders, it has preached liberalism in trade, within its own borders unfortunately some protectionism has raised its ugly head and the Republican dominated Congress has put obstacles in the President's way.

Effect of Recent Global Economic Crisis on Bangladesh: Bangladesh economy is, to a large extent, dependent on the economic growth of the developed countries. In the recent meeting of the donor countries, \$ 1.9 million was committed to Bangladesh for the current year. In the long run, however, if the world economy were to slow down, the developed world will find it difficult to sustain the massive aid programmes indefinitely.

Austerity Measures: The country will have to take recourse to austerity measures by regularising its own economy before IMF or the donor countries impose even harder conditions to implement for their continued aid.

Iraq, Israel and the US

A S M Nurunnabi

There appears to be an intriguing contrast in the policies adopted by the United States towards Iraq and Israel. In the light of the recent happenings in the Middle East culminating in the expulsion of the UN arms inspectors from Iraq, the US has mobilised a massive military presence in the Gulf in the form of troops and aircraft carriers to force Iraq to bow down in the matter of allowing UN arms inspectors to return and to carry on their interrupted duties.

The Russian mediation helped to avert what looked like an inevitable showdown. The US made it clear there would be no softening of stand against Iraq for enforcing UN resolutions in the matter of elimination of reported Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

As against this firm US stand against Iraq, what do we find in the US policy towards Israel? The softness of the US towards Israel is well-known. But it is the general feeling of

international observers that the US should not have followed a weak-kneed policy in all issues when Israel is concerned. Israel has been following an anti-Palestinian policy with impunity in all matters affecting Palestinian interests.

It has continued with its projected construction of new Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, withheld Palestinian share of revenues, facilitated within Palestinian held pockets of territories and beyond terminating Palestinian scope for employment outside their own territorial peripheries, dug an underground tunnel beneath a sacred religious edifice.

The peace process initiated by the slain Israeli Prime Minister Rabin came to a dead-end. The US took some diplomatic initiatives to end the deteriorating situation no doubt, but the Israeli intransigence,

against which the US found itself helpless, has, for all practical purposes, thrown the peace process off the track. It is also held by many international observers without any denial that Israel also holds weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, biological and chemical arsenals. But who can dare touch Israel in this respect when the US is its patron?

So the game of threatening Iraq with dire punishments if it does not toe the UN line and, on the other hand, appeasing Israel even it cares very little for UN majority opinion, particularly on the question of construction of new Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, goes on Yasser Arafat ran from door-to-door of some of the world leaders with his urgent appeal for help in restoring the peace process but to effect.

The world looks with growing unease on the glaring exercise of discrimination as between Iraq and Israel.

To the Editor...

Bus service for women

Sir, Ours is a strong religious value-oriented society that teaches us to hold the women folk in high esteem in all spheres of life irrespective of religions. But that idea has stood totally negative to me during travelling by bus in our beloved Dhaka city. In this city thousands of women who use buses as their main transport. But they are not treated by the service providers as human beings.

Whenever a bus stops at a bus-stop, the bus-helper helps the awaited women/girls to get inside the bus in quite an odd manner. Even they do not hesitate to touch their bodies. The story inside the bus is not less derogatory. Lusty hand of the fare collector is often found on the back of them with the lame excuse of collecting freight.

Most of all the so-called gentlemen lurk for a chance to have an unnecessary collision with the women in the heavily crowded bus. Under the circumstances introduction of bus service in the capital especially for this mentally as well as physically tortured segment of our city has become a demand of the period.

Of course the driver, helper and conductor of our expected bus service for the women will also be females. Will the authority concerned pay heed to this matter?

Teeto
509/Zia Hall,
University of Dhaka

Tele-talk!

Sir, The authority concerned is trying to let the cellular telecommunicating agencies get the benefit of enjoying one hundred per cent monopoly in running their business. No rightful move has been made to give way to the operation of cable telephone in Bangladesh. It is to our best of understanding that the hand sets used for the cellular telephone damages the brain for which in most advanced countries, these have become very unpopular and certain brands manufactured by well-known electronic companies have been

banned! Yet, in our country the health-hazard aspect has been totally over-looked.

However, we eagerly await the government's decision about cable telephones where table-top or wall-sets are not only safe for physical and mental health but also cheaper.

Monira Zaman
5/1, Mogoltoli,
Dhaka

One-way traffic

Sir, I would invite the Mayor of the city corporation to visit Road No. 6 of Dhanmondi R/A, between 08:00 and 08:45 in the morning and 03:45 and 14:30 in the afternoon to see things for himself and decide whether this road could be made open to one-way traffic only for easing traffic congestion.

Four educational institutions, one diagnostic centre-clinic and Dhanmondi Police Station are located on this road. All types of vehicles—from cycle rickshaw to heavy 15 ton police truck—ply this road and it becomes miserably congested during peak hours. Please have a heart—the children are in a sorry plight.

A Parent
Dhaka

BTV and earthquake

Sir, On 21st November, 97, at 5:20 PM a severe earthquake rocked Chittagong city and its adjoining area. Never in living memory Chittagong been struck with earthquake of such ferocity, the quake lasted for twenty-six seconds, which is quite a long time. People were terror-stricken.

Quite a number of people lost their lives and damage done to property is considerable. If the earthquake had lasted a few more seconds, we cringe to think what would have happened! But the mercy of Allah saved us. But BTV's news casting about the quake surprised us. It should have been the first in the news headlines, but the news about the earthquake was not only last, it was termed as a 'mild tremor'. How could be a tremor of such violence could be termed as mild? We are outraged

and deeply resent the attitude of Bangladesh TV.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

It's government's turn

Sir, I read the editorial "Garments Stampede" on November 24 where it was chalked out the reasons very specifically. Why such irreparable losses of life are occurring and pointed out how easily this can be avoided? This fire-related accidents in the garment factories are happening almost on a regular basis and none but the factory owners and the authority concerned of the government are to be held responsible in this regard. Had the garment factory owners been guided by their conscience, of course the government would have no business there.

But since the factory owners' only concern is making money and no headache about the safety of the workers, the responsibility now rests on the government. It is not mere suggestion and request on the part of the government will work in this case and I consider the government can enact some strict laws compelling the factory owners take some particular safety measures as The Daily Star has suggested. Otherwise, this sad tale will continue to be appearing on the front pages of the dailies which we don't want to see.

Shamim Ahsan
64/MRK Mission Road,
Gopibagh, Dhaka-1203

"For a 5-year Caretaker Government"

Sir, I fully endorse the views expressed in The Daily Star of Oct 29 by Shihab Burkan in the editorial page under opinion "For a 5-year Caretaker Government."

Mr Razzag
Sonadanga, Khulna