

Just Cool It

Supposedly a good omen for tranquillity in the hills the CHT peace accord has turned out to be a precursor of spiralling violence. A few lives have already been lost in BDR firing and a hundred injured in Khagrachhari. BNP's agitational programme bordering on fomentation but ironically anointed as a political bid to deal with a political problem and the government's equally resistive dynamism against it have put the ambience to a boil. It is fast dipping into a catch 22 situation.

In an earlier reaction to the rumblings of trouble we had warned the government against 'dangerous complacency' over taking things for granted about public knowledge of the accord's details. We advised an educational campaign on the clauses protecting the interests of both the communities — plainlanders in the CHT and the tribals. This has been started by Minister Matia Chowdhury among the Bengali settlers, so we hear, but obviously so much more will be have to be done to remove the public misgivings there.

To the BNP we say the constitutional issues you have raised about the peace accord can not be resolved in the streets; these need to be taken to the court for adjudication and settlement — that is the dictate of reason and constitutionalism. But for reasons, best known to BNP leaders, its Secretary General and spokesman Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has lately discounted the possibility of going to the court adding they would much rather seek a "political solution" (whatever that means) to the problem. But we had expected them to go to the court; for that would have generated sensible cool-headed analysis of the terms of the accord as the court gave its considered verdict over violation of the constitution as alleged by the BNP. Thereby politics could be elevated to a higher plane. We are disappointed by BNP's balking at the court option. It is now going to be a propaganda contest between the two sides with national interest likely to be fully swamped by the hype.

Our suggestions are: distribute re-prints of the peace accord all over the CHT, go house-to-house explaining what is there in it for each community and run media programmes with neutral people interpreting the treaty's various aspects. The whole idea is to replace propaganda by an elicitation of public opinion, so that people's involvement is assured in the decision-making process and no travesty of truth can occur.

What Makes it So Tardy?

Over the years the problem ridden labour sector has remained one of the most delicate, unpredictable and unclear zones in the whole gamut of industrial relations in Bangladesh. If there is any particular evil to be singled out as the most powerful attenuating factor in the perennially less inciting public sector it is no doubt its long history of labour unrest. Yet the past governments practically did nothing to set things right. What they did from time to time was crisis management in essence, characterised by short term bailing out lagniappes.

Bereft of enlightened leadership and subject to the temptation of government pampering the CBAs by and large turned into pockets of vested interest. Preservation of labour's right which happened to be the creative impulse behind the idea of collective bargaining agents took the back seat. National interest was sacrificed more often than not as strike calls and other disruptive measures became the lone indicator of CBA existence.

What amazes one is the tardiness over the idea of infusing an element of rationality and professionalism in the concept of CBA. All the past governments had to go through the CBA related problems at different phases of their tenure and all of them seemed to have found where the shoe exactly pinched yet all of them preferred to carry this enormous baggage! We hear the draft Code over which the labour leaders and Bangladesh Employers Association have now got involved in a wrangle went to the Cabinet in 1995. But it was sent back in the face of the protest of the trade union representatives who said some of the elements did not have their approval. How could there be so many loose ends in an initiative concerning such a vital sector of our economy?

The recent eruptions of trouble in some of the industrial hubs which considerably embarrassed the government have brought country's intractable labour sector under focus. Let the government summon enough political will to bring about the needed labour reform.

Barbaric

Chan Mia and his wife Renu of Mirzaganj in Patuakhali received in dreams an injunction to sacrifice their five-year old only son Hasan and drench some fallow plot of land with his blood. In return they were promised treasure lying buried under that plot. They did what they were told in their dreams. But there was no treasure to be found anywhere. Waking up to their cruel deed they lost their minds and told neighbours of their crime. Traumatized, both of them have apparently lost their power of speech.

As a ready reaction one may be tempted to say spread of education with strong scientific bias could stop recurrence of such crimes. But education and science hardly heal man of superstition and irrational beliefs leading to harm to others. In a healthy society there is less chance of such aberrations to take over people's minds: How to build such a healthy society? If Chan Mia and his wife were not so much hard up, they would not hanker after treasure not their own. But what about obeying and carrying out dream behests? How could we tell them this is against humanity, law and religion? before the crime?

One point is indubitably true. Dreams do not ask the gullible to slaughter the local bully or anyone strong and beyond the power of the dreamer. It is a measure of a child's weakness and helplessness that elders are not chosen by dreams for sacrifice. Children as well as women must become very genuinely and unfailingly inviolate.

Pakistan's Intra-government Power Struggle

The baffled Pakistanis, in their exasperation, are still piecing the details of the episode to pinpoint what was it all about.

PAKISTAN'S recent political crisis pitting the country's President and the Chief Justice against an overwhelmingly mandated Prime Minister is ostensibly over — at least for the time being, although the tremor it caused would take time to be set at rest. As both the rivals of the Prime Minister in the bitter power struggle are already out of the ring presumably after a mediation by the country's powerful military, an embattled Mian Nawaz Sharif is now licking his wound and busy consolidating his tenuous victory. In the meantime, the baffled Pakistanis, in their exasperation, are still piecing the details of the episode to pinpoint what was it all about. So far, the only clue to the stand off has come from the Prime Minister himself when in a televised speech to the nation he spoke of a deep conspiracy against him, his government and democracy. Indeed, a series of sleazy conspiracies, and all behind-the-scene, have been the hallmark of Pakistan's politics ever since the country came into being. The present one — if it is proved to be a case of conspiracy — is obviously the latest in the series and of a different kind after having exhausted all other varieties of it.

Fifty years ago when Pakistan — comprised of Muslim majority areas of British India separated by over one thousand miles of alien territory — was created, by all reckoning, it was a novel experiment in the history of nation state-building. But it lacked both political resources and earnestness to attempt the Herculean task. Instead, a small coterie of power brokers tried to chart the course of the nation's destiny for an equally small vested interests although a Constituent Assembly (CA) was brought into existence right at the outset in 1947. The CA, supposed to be a sovereign body in a parliamentary system — which Pakistan pretended to be — with its principal task of framing the country's constitution failed in its mission and through myriad omission and commission abdicated its supremacy to a bunch of self-serving bureaucrats who gradually took upon themselves the task of framing the state policy.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the nation's founding father, who had a dictatorial disposition, was himself a hurdle for the growth of democratic institution. Not only he neglected the democratic norms he used to appoint, in his imperious way, the ministers and party office bearers without even consulting the Parliament or the Prime Minister. This, among other things, impeded the growth of a healthy relationship between the executive and the legislature right from the beginning and subsequently resulted in a chronic power struggle between them with each trying to gain upperhand over another. Pak-

istan's entire political history is characterised by this phenomenon.

When Jinnah died a lonely man only after a year of his country's creation, Liaqat Ali Khan who never liked his overassertive boss decided to appoint a pliable Governor-General and Khaza Nazimuddin was an apt choice for the slot. But unfortunately the Prime Minister, henceforth the real head of the government could not rise to the height needed to assert the supremacy of democracy over the bureaucracy which surreptitiously infiltrated into the country's top decision-making process. However, after his assassination in 1951 he was succeeded by Khaza Nazim Uddin — a still more weak Prime Minister — to make way for an ambitious Finance Minister Ghulam Muhammad to climb the apex of the power structure. Although these appointments and the way they were made were illegal and undemocratic, the CA — the so-called parliament — unashamedly ratified those unlawful actions without any debate or discussion thus throwing all rules, conventions and practices of democracy to wind. Once saddled to his throne, the new governor general — formerly a civil servant, having no idea of parliamentary democracy, began to behave like a British viceroy of colonial times.

This portended a period of an uneasy partnership, as before, between the Executive and the Legislature and a tussle between the two ensued. Such rift, when it was combined with diabolical intrigues and manipulations of Ghulam Muhammad played havoc with the budding political process of the country. The bureaucracy under his leadership staged unrecorded first coup against the politicians by dismissing Khaza Nazim Uddin and his cabinet in 1953 after two years of bickering over power-sharing between the two. But none, not even the parliament, protested against the action. In the same high handed manner Mohammad Ali of Bogra was pitchforked from Washington and installed in Prime Minister's office although he was neither a member of the parliament nor the Leader of Muslim League parliamentary party. Mohammad Ali was made Prime Minister for limited purposes and to serve his benefactor blindly.

Once these purposes were served and the relationship served sour, he was unceremoniously bundled back to his old place. Before that in another diabolical move Ghulam Muhammad dissolved the sovereign Constituent Assembly with an approving nod from both civil and military bureaucracy. His consolidation of

power was now almost complete with the backing of bureaucracy, industrialists, commercial magnets and the landlords of the Punjab and Sind. He needed support only from a volatile East Bengal and NWFP. While he succeeded in drafting Khan Sahib of NWFP in his cabinet, in a shrewd political manoeuvre he could also drive a wedge between Subhrawary and Fazil Huq in East Bengal. A bitter competition between the two resulted in a new power equation in which Chowdhury Muhammad Ali became the new Prime Minister with the support of Fazil Huq.

Chowdhury Muhammad Ali was democratically elected leader of the coalition party and was one able to give a constitution to the country in March 1956. He succeeded in clearing up much of the mess-up created by the previous regimes under Ghulam Muhammad and being a former civil servant he also was well aware of the bureaucratic tricks. He was a well meaning person and his collision course with Ghulam Muhammad was inevitable, but this time the lat-

er was on the defensive. In a subtle move, soon the old decrepit governor-general was eased out of his office. The new Prime Minister, however, made his *faux pas* when he appointed infamous General Iskander Mirza, a master intriguer, the country's President under 1956 constitution. He soon turned his presidential palace into a hot bed of intrigues with a view to acquiring absolute power. This inevitably brought him in clash with his Prime Minister. He persuaded Khan Sahib to float his republican party to counter Muslim League in West Pakistan which was the Prime Minister's main support base. As the Republican party grew in strength under the President's direct patronage, the Prime Minister's position became untenable. In less than year Chowdhury Muhammad Ali made his exit in September 1956.

In his strategy to discredit the politicians and thus seal the political future of the country, Mirza's next plot was to appoint Subhrawary the next Prime Minister. Earlier, Ghulam Muhammad roped him in as law minister in the cabinet of Mohammad Ali of Bogra. Subhrawary agreed to Mirza's offer hoping that he would be able to deliver now within the

groomed for power politics by both Ghulam Muhammad and Iskander Mirza. While a caricature of entry and exit of a few more cabinets went on Ayub Khan together with Mirza was busy putting their game plan in action. In the emerging political vacuum only months before the scheduled first-ever general election as well as his retirement in early 1959 he found it most opportune time to strike in October 1958. Thus ended the formative first decade of Pakistan in an ignominy which the nation could never wash off its face.

Pakistan's political failure only after a decade of its experimentation cannot, however, be attributed to conspiracy alone. There are historical as well as socio-political factors which made Pakistan's transition from a feudal entity to a modern democracy a difficult proposition. During the colonial period the British nourished only the regulated presidencies of India i.e. Bengal, Bombay and Madras, the earliest British possession in the subcontinent for democracy and rule of law. In a medieval semi-feudal system in the western region having the least exposure to British rule the people living there were not considered even for the grant of fundamen-

tal rights. The provinces now constituting Pakistan were non-regulation provinces up to 1921 where all powers — executive, magisterial and judicial were concentrated in the hands to Deputy Commissioners whereas the presidency like Bengal was a Regulation province where the rights of the citizens were strictly defined and restrictions were imposed on authorities. In this socio-political milieu which prevailed till now the politics in Pakistan is the preserve of feudal elite comprised of more or less 300 families. Through blood ties, marriage and business they dominate the military, the bureaucracy and the government. There is not much of an urban middle-class considered essential for parliamentary democracy.

With Subhrawary out of the ring the stage was now set for crushing the country's political forces in a final decisive blow. Ayub Khan had been waiting in wings since 1953 when he was inducted by Ghulam Muhammad in the Cabinet as Defence Minister. He was sufficiently

power early this year with an overwhelming majority gave rise to new problems in the power equation particularly when his parliament legislated 13th amendment in the constitution taking away the presidential power to dismiss the government and the assemblies. The President seemed to take the development somewhat grudgingly and the vested interests perhaps did not take in good grace the enhanced stature of the Prime Minister. Notwithstanding, the scrapping of the 8th Amendment which gave the President his wide discretionary power, the President's power equation in the establishment remained unchanged as an independent centre of power under the prevailing arrangements. President Leghari continued to act like an executive President treating himself as moral and political arbiter of the nation. He still considered the Prime Minister and the assemblies only a junior partner in the power structure. The same goes for the influence and prestige of the Army chief. In spite of the military's frequent avowals of being only a subordinate component of the government, the generals are, by all indications, fond of exercising influence and power and enjoying perks and privileges without responsibility.

In the past when the Executive and Legislature bitterly fought each other for domination, and the Executive with the backing of the Army, bureaucracy and business magnets tried to denude the legislature of all power — it was the Judiciary which made all efforts to keep a balance between the two. With their pragmatic judgements, the judges forced the Executive to disgorge what it already swallowed. But in the recent crisis in a bizarre sequence of events even the Judiciary got involved in the brawl and for the first time it went affray denigrating the country's most sacred institution. It is an irony that a routine matter of the appointment of the Prime Minister, the so-called leader of the people, was not supreme. He was always hemmed in by the advice of the Army chief on the one hand and by the President on the other.

The Army chief always spoke for a supposed consensus among the officer corps of the Army while the President, in a loose sense, reflected the consensus to the civilian part of the bureaucracy. It is thus clear that so-called democracy in Pakistan had so far been straight-jacketed by civil-military bureaucracy through the institution of troika. Since the generals commanding 600 thousand rifles stood behind the President and the bureaucracy obeyed them, the President's authority was not undermined. Farooq Leghari could act and send elected representatives of the people home unceremoniously.

However, Sharif's return to

students out of politics, or say goodbye to our future.

To start with, we could try at least begin the process of creating a socially responsible cadre of students who participate in the constructive and not the destructive aspect of the civic life of the nation. Education is not just about academic accoutrements but also about teaching our young some values about life, and regard for their world. Unless we force them to learn we will have on our hands a truly untutored and unruly mob.

To side track a little, in Italy, students who want to avoid the compulsory military conscription, have started to do an equal time in civil service and voluntary work. The students I have spoken to, all feel a great sense of achievement and involvement in doing community service work. Wistfully and naively perhaps, I think it would be a great idea, if we could adopt part of the Italian student plan, in our country. If we could force all our university students, and those who are presently wasting their lives in campus politics and violence, to be bound by law to complete a certain period of time in service to the community and nation, we could, in a sense be fighting fire with fire.

In Italy, students have to do a range of social service, like helping and caring for the disabled and aged, tutoring other students, doing construction and even menial work, as well as working in museums, hospitals, clinics, slums, running soup kitchens and refugee or rehabilitation centers, anything that makes them feel a part of the vast network of humanity that makes up the community, and makes them value their role in nurturing it.

In Bangladesh, particularly one can think of the million things a corps of community workers could achieve. An institutionalized civil corps of students and youth could be just the medicine to detract the destructive energy of the students of our country, forcing the young to take responsibility for their lives and that of others, teaching them respect for the community, and creating a much needed army of workers to solve our urban and community problems. Legislation could make it compulsory for our students, who are so active in the negative sense, to do their share in building the country they so thoughtlessly destroy. If they are our future, then perhaps, they should be forced to pave their own way to it so as to cherish it better, and to teach their elders what democracy is really about.

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz



A Study in Grey: Our Students and Politics

We accept "campus violence" and silently suffer having our educational institutions held hostage to the will of the student activists, who are manipulated by our politicos

POSTSCRIPT

Neeman A Sobhan

It takes very little for us to be riled up, yet how sad that when it comes to our children being misled by the pied pipers of politics, we are not outraged enough to do something about it.

We accept "campus violence" and silently suffer having our educational institutions held

hostage to the will of the student activists, who are manipulated by our politicos. We and our politicians would like to think of these students as anonymous statistics in the newspapers. Yet, that faceless 'Chhato' foolishly playing political cops and robbers with grenades in the campus halls, is still our offspring, our responsibility and the nation's most valuable resource. Admittedly, of course, they are also the spoilt brats of the political parties who nurture them then use them as human machines of destruction, and it is tempting to pass them off as the responsibility of those who breed them. But allowing our political parties to continue to play with our students is equivalent to setting up a time bomb that is not only slowly ticking to blow up our entire educational culture and its infrastructure in our face, but that will eventually destroy all of us.

In a surprisingly resigned way we are all aware of this, and realize that without a well educated, socially stable and motivated generation of young citizens, we face an apocalyptic future. And yet we are not pushed to protest this unacceptable situation. We listen to our politicians who are themselves responsible for this scenario, pay lip service to the need to redress the situation, but we do not feel strongly enough about it to force the issue.

When children go into the slavery of the unscrupulous few, it shackles and emasculates the generation before and the generation to come. The country is passing into the paws of a suicidal class, including not just the country's young but also their short sighted and unethical puppet masters, who willfully refuse to see that Democracy is not about revolutions, hartals, and street politics but about conscientious and harmonious community living.

It is suicidal on our part too, to merely wish the students to stop in their self-destructive course, or to urge the government to do something about it. We must insist that action be taken urgently, putting it at a high place on the national agenda. It is imperative to the health of a democratic and civic culture in the country, that legislative action be taken immediately that reduces, regulates and channels student participation in policies. Any education policy must go hand-in-hand with one that forces the neutrality of the student body. We must keep our

The house-rent dilemma

Sir, According to the government order regarding the implementation of the 5th National Pay Scale, the government employees will be paid the house-rent 'drawn' in June, 1997 unchanged for the next two years. Everybody understands that if the new scale was not announced, the employees would get two yearly increments in their basic pay at the rates of their former scales and also the house-rent would increase twice in the two years from July, 1997 to June, 1999.

We realise that the government has not enough money to pay the over eight lakh employees the benefit of both enhanced basic pay and the house-rent just now. But can the government deprive the employees of their incremental benefit in the house-rent for long two years? Is there any such financial rules to withhold the increment (in house-rent) for two years except disciplinary measures?

On what basis the government has declared such an unlawful and unjustified method of implementing the pay scale? I suggest that the government should replace the word 'drawn' by the term 'at the scale' meaning that the employees will get incremental benefit in the house-rent at their respective scales of the 4th National Pay Scale for the stipulated two years.

If the government fails to review, a question will arise if actually decreasing the salary in the name of increasing

MAS Molla
Member, BAAS
Dhaka

To the Editor...

What a shame!

Sir, In last 25 years when the authority concerned in India has been refusing to issue a single sheet of registration form to register our relatively good quality pharmaceutical products, we have recently allowed Indian pharmaceutical companies to register and market hundreds of their low quality products in one go, only to destroy our organised pharmaceutical industry.

How our Drug Administration, which runs on our common tax payers' money, could allow such an act to happen by putting our local pharmaceuticals' existence in jeopardy?

To our utter surprise we noticed that our very vocal press has also missed this vital national issue.

We have a pharmaceutical association, whose prime responsibility is to protect the basic interest of local industry. But, surprisingly enough, the key leaders of the association opted to remain mute, probably to swap this act of grave national damage with their own petty personal gains.

The heroes of 1980 controversial Drug Policy, which later forced multinational pharmaceutical companies to desert from Bangladesh *en masse*, also remained silent over this naked invasion of Indian pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh.

Ali Sadekin
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Dhaka traffic

Sir, It seems a very wonderful idea that people 'up there' have decided to streamline the traffic problems in our fair city. And making Motijheel a rickshaw-free zone is simply the tip

These courses are of 48 hours duration and are scheduled in the early evenings so those in the labor force can take advantage of them.</p