

Neither the Dream of Ram Raj nor the Fear of Roma Raj...

Physics is Not the Enemy

If our academics cannot settle academic issues across the table, we have no right to demand negotiated resolution of social, economic and political conflicts.

The soul of architecture is in its aesthetics, in the supreme art it is. Very close to music. Architecture has one scoring point above all other arts.

The Academic Council, by a big vote, last year-end introduced physics as a subject in the admission test of the Architecture faculty.

The architecture faculty in BUET is in mortal fear of losing its distinctiveness that has taken so much of advanced thinking and unremitting care to fashion.

Overland Corridor

We are pleased over the fact that India has agreed again to enable landlocked Nepal to trade with the outside world via Bangladesh.

But this is an overland facility that on a six-month 'probation' earlier on had dismally failed to work, except for only three truckloads passing through Banglabandha in Bangladesh.

Officials of both countries are going to meet in New Delhi towards the end of the current month. Since it involves the crucial agenda of operationalisation of an overland facility as distinguished from mere 'transit on paper' it is essential that Bangladesh's inputs be sought for evolving a well-rounded modus operandi.

In a related development, a parliamentarians' delegation from Nepal is scheduled to visit Mongla Port today with a view to ascertaining the facilities available to them for their transit through Bangladesh.

They are thinking of using Mongla as a less expensive alternative to Calcutta port. Mongla port has to be upgraded on a crash basis.

Street-prone College

Dhaka College students have once again resorted to lawlessness to register their protest. On Monday evening students reportedly angered by the frequent disruption of power and water supplies damaged some vehicles on the nearby road.

Now, frequent power failure and shortage in water supply are no doubt a potent source of annoyance for students for whom time is of the essence. And these are only the basics that every citizen is well within his or her rights to demand.

Actually this another outburst of Dhaka College students has more to do with the college's long history of relentless exposure to unscrupulous politics than outrage from aggrieved citizen's point of view.

Every now and then college boys enter into clashes with shopowners of the neighbourhood. From book shop owners to the grocers at the New Market a Dhaka College student is synonymous with terror and extortion.

Dhaka College has been an important factor in the deterioration of law and order in the area. As a premier educational institution of the country can Dhaka College afford such a bad name?

RESULTS have only confirmed the general impression held long before the polls. It is a hung Parliament, this time more precariously poised than before.

What it boils down to is that there was no wave in favour of any party or any leader. The voters, increasingly disillusioned, have gone mostly by the performance of the government at the Centre or in their states.

To say that Sonia Gandhi made the difference is a delusion in which the Congress leaders are indulging without any proof. She may have galvanised the party but she has not garnered votes.

Many may accept the thesis that the BJP be given a chance since it has never been tried at the Centre before and since it is more coherent than the combination of Congress and the United Front.

She visited as many as 134 constituencies. Congress has won in 49 in those constituencies against 50 in the 1996 election.

Charismatic Atal Behari Vajpayee's histrionic talent too have made little difference. He opened the campaign with a meeting in the constituency of Kamal Nath, a non-sitting Congress MP from Madhya Pradesh.

The combination has secured only two out of a total of 10.

Neither dream of the Ram Raj peddled across the country was taken seriously nor the fear of the Roma Raj, aroused on the basis of Sonia Gandhi's entry.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

can be applied to assess the voters' mind, it has been the performance in terms of their amelioration. Accordingly, the United Front ruling at the Centre has been decimated.

of the Sikhs who, after having stayed in the wilderness for many years, have not yet written off the Akali Dal.

Really speaking, people have lost faith in the one-party rule. The emergency (1975-77) was probably the watershed.

The Janata Party, which came to power in 1977, was not a single party but a combination of several parties, including the Jana Sangh, predecessor of the BJP.

a patched quilt, which came apart within a few months.

In the face of this, the voters have not given a clear mandate to anyone. Nonetheless, I see some weight in the argument by the BJP and its allies that they have been given wider and firmer support in the country since they joined hands before going to the polls.

But neither the BJP and its allies nor Congress and the United Front have spared any method or tactics to defeat each other. None of the two sides can occupy the high ground of morality.

How Onions Got Too Pungent and Salt Tasted Too Bitter?

by Md Asadullah Khan

The economic strains in any country exacerbate strains in the rank and file of the population and pose a threat to the flowering of democracy and good governance.

PRICE of onion and salt had suddenly shot up beyond anybody's imagination. While the salt price-hike, believably a manipulation either with political motives or for profit mongering, lasted for one day, onion price hike continues to torment people.

The price escalation, however, was not altogether a surprise. Last year because of heavy rain in Assam-Kartik (concluding October), when onions are cultivated, even slightly low lying areas got submerged and muddy.

against a demand of 4 lakh 15 thousand tons of onion in the country, actual production rose only to 1 lakh 42 thousand tons.

This year Faridpur and some places of Pabna and Kushtia and Ishurdi that supply the bulk of the country's needs are almost dry. To make matters worse, the fall in the production of onions in India has compounded the present problem.

Onions being a perishable commodity, storage or other means of maintaining a buffer stock can help very little to play any critical role to augment the supply position in the market.

while, to intervene, you need a buffer stock. Only the light red rabi variety that is transplanted in January and harvested in May lasts in stores for nearly six months.

Pathetically true, the agencies concerned in the country were not fully alive to the situation that had its root much earlier and when the situation went somewhat out of control bringing public criticism to the respective ministry rose to the occasion allaying public fear and resentment by making a disclosure that government would import onions and the import tariff that remained at 37 per cent in the previous years would be reduced to 30 per cent to help the market being stabilized.

the stability of any government in any country and rival factions make no delay to downplay the image and working standard of the ruling party through grabbing such sensitive issues that directly affect the living of ordinary people.

It is certainly true that world economy and market trends today are extremely complex. But notwithstanding all such unpredictable and capricious market forces there it plays, there is undeniably a large amount of analysis and statistical information available on many intricate issues.

While the government effort to arrest an artificial salt crisis attempted by some manipulators has been most welcome, some such measures on other fronts are also needed.

Tongi area where salt panic created a tense situation brought huge stocks of salt in the front of the market premises from hiding and the price stabilised.

The economic strains in any country exacerbate strains in the rank and file of the population and pose a threat to the flowering of democracy and good governance.

The production mechanism seems to have been affected also by frequent power disruption that shows no sign of improvement in the immediate future.

general election in the next two years.

Samata Party leader George Fernandes, a seasoned politician as he is, sounds naive when he says that the United Front should allow the BJP and its allies to form the government.

Now suppose the game of numbers is abandoned, then what is the criterion? In the case of the BJP, it will be more difficult to justify. It represents a philosophy which is hotly opposed in the country.

OPINION

Politics Gone Mad!

Aly Zaker

Congratulations for your timely commentary under the above caption.

Indeed, politics here now is smothered by hail and high water of irrationality and expediency. If this is not politics of madness what is? If a nation that was born out of sweat, tears and blood of innumerable souls, a country that is supposed to manifest the great ideals that our predecessors lived and died for, this is indeed tragic.

Of course this is not the first time that The Daily Star has come out in to the open with another timely and thought-provoking rejoinder on the fool-hardiness of our politicians. The DS has, on most occasions, been judicious, proper and objective.

This time on, I am afraid, your objectivity has been tinged with a tilt towards a little more accommodation towards one party to strike a cautious balance. This, despite the fact that in the existing political pandemonium perhaps not all parties are equally villainous.

Before venturing into my arguments please permit me to vouch that I have always been a pluralist. I believe that my support or sympathy for a political party, if there is one, is my inherent democratic right just as it is the inherent right of another person to support a party that I do not agree with. As the saying goes, 'I may not agree with what you say but I shall fight to the last to uphold your right to say so.'

But, when you venture to sum up; in the column under reference, I dare say you would do the nation a great service by calling a spade a spade.

Would I be wrong if I said that for the political impasse the opposition BNP and its allies' intransigencies and stubbornness is more responsible than anything else? There is an argument in circulation that all this happened right after the arrival of the opposition leader at the citadel of sanctity.

A spokesperson of the BNP wrote in the DS that the leader herself was perplexed by what followed soon after her arrival. She hastened to leave the Shaheed Minar. There was a clear suggestion that some one other

the same coin while in power. While hastening to advance this argument its advocates seem to become oblivious of the issues behind the two acts of boycott. The opposition then had taken recourse to boycott as a last resort on the demand of elections to be held under a caretaker government.

By comparison the demands of the opposition now would seem almost infantile if closely scrutinised. Since your column appeared, there has been considerable development in the political arena of the country. The government has signed an agreement with the opposition on their demands and the opposition has kindly consented to go back to the Parliament.

I hope it would not be out of place to register my dissent at agreeing to accommodate one of BNP's demands, namely venue for public meetings. I think under no circumstances anybody should be allowed to hold the citizens of this country hostage to their irrational demands. Nobody but the die-hard cohorts of the opposition want any public meetings on the city streets. Perhaps BNP should have endeavoured to gauge public opinion on this issue before being stubborn about their demand.

Now let me focus on the issue of desecration of Shaheed Minar on the 21st February. This was despicable to say the least. I have met at least half a dozen non-partisan observers of the unfortunate incidents that forenoon. The consensus of the observers was that the racket was started by the young volunteers surrounding the leader of the opposition. It started with gentle jostling and pushing of people in their list of demands.

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than BNP had indulged in the orgy that morning. What a logic! The fact is that it is very seldom that the leader of the opposition has to confront what her party goons do down there on the streets.

Verily she would be taken aback, embarrassed and worried. If I ever had the privilege I would venture to ask her if she was oblivious of the consequences when, from a public platform where she herself presented her chosen lawmakers had ordered their party followers to be up on anybody walking in a 'Mujib coat' on the city streets of Dhaka. Consequently, a gentleman was manhandled near the Press Club. It later transpired that the person was a BNP supporter. He was sporting a 'Mujib Coat' merely because he liked to wear such a coat. Only recently, when two BNP lawmakers defied that party dictate and decided to join the Parliament, a very important lawmaker of the party declared them persona non-grata in the city of Dhaka.

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The Shaheed Dibash predicament was, perhaps, the opposition leader's first encounter with what follows when leaders choose to opt for irresponsible hyperbole.

To add to what happened at the Shaheed Minar, I would like to bring to your attention the disgraceful attack on one of our leading cultural personalities Mr Ramendu Majumdar. If a person as benign and decent as Mr Majumdar could have been singled out for such roughing up, I shudder to think what fate awaits me after this opinion of mine saw the light of the day in print. My only solace is that, that would only prove my point. I feel that we should not let gross misdeeds pass without dissent if we believe in the freedom of thought and welfare of our beloved nation. It would auger well for the country if both the main parties of the country refrain from perpetrating a politics of confrontation; perhaps a wee bit more, the BNP, looking at their performances in the past.

To the Editor...

Effigy burning, is it an offense or not?

Sir, In the March 4, 1998 issue of The Daily Star there was a news item on the front page. Effigy making materials recovered from DU hall. It was stated that Detective Police on March 3, recovered a saree, a blouse and some other materials along with a portrait of PM Sheikh Hasina from a hall of Dhaka University and claimed that those were accumulated there to make an effigy of Sheikh Hasina and burn it in public.

From the activities of the police and the importance given to it by the press we can assume that making effigy and burning it is a punishable offense.

But I don't understand how the same action, instead of being offensive become a source of merry-making in other circumstances? In the last page of March 1, '98 issue of The Daily Star there was a large photograph showing members of Muktiyoddha Sishu-Kishore Command burning an effigy of Begum Khaleda Zia. Where were the policemen then, why did they not take any steps to stop it?

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Gathering the youths

Sir, Many thanks to The Daily Star for organising this seminar. It is comforting to find out the young entrepreneurs are not on their own any more. They have the support and promised cooperation of the most popular daily in the country. We are happy to know the red tapes are also being worked upon. However, I believe the seminar failed to focus on its most vaunted promise — the actual investment opportunities in Bangladesh for young people. You see, we young people have the bright ideas, energy and enthusiasm to do new things. What we lack most is the capital, the connections and experience. We also need publicity — to tell the world outside: 'Hey, here we are, this what we

are doing. Come and buy our service.'

Had the speakers dwelled on such subjects it would indeed have been a very fruitful discussion. Today we hear so much about investments in oil, gas and power and the golden opportunities being offered by the government. Other than awaiting the uninterrupted distribution of gas and electricity to our homes and offices there is little else young people can do in these sectors because of the high volume of capital investment.

We have heard of backward linkage industries in garments and footwear. I would like to know about the existence of backward linkage industries or service industries related to oil, gas and power exploration projects which are not capital-intensive and yet harness the ingenuity of creative young minds. Come on we can't allow those foreign multinationals take away all the profit from drilling our resources! We too want a fair share.

Tanim Laila Business student IBA, Dhaka

"Gherao"

Sir, I read a lot of articles in The Daily Star say "Gherao" to mean surround any place. Has "Gherao" been adopted in the English language?

Arif Joarder Wichita State University Wichita, Kansas, USA

"A Land of Rapists?"

Sir, The editorial A Land of Rapists? on the 14th February, 1998 was very comprehensive in assessing the attitude problems of young people towards social norms in Bangladesh and other parts of the world. Since the dawn of human civilisation and culture all kinds of sexual perversions including rape have been playing a role in changing the minds of man and woman on earth. With the

change of time and place, ethics are being changed.

Because of the revolution in print and photo media and the internet, perversion of the highest order is found even in the smallest unit of family life — father, mother, daughter, son — all are enjoying the essence of life by reading pornography books and by watching films privately.

Such a state of the condition is the result of the scientific inventions in our times which are changing rapidly the very concept of professional ethics in every aspect of human living on earth.

Abul Ashraf Noor House#9, Rota-4 Sector#5, Uttara, Dhaka.

US vs Iraq?

Sir, If any UN resolution has been broken, then how come only Clinton and Tony Blair are doing all the talking? What is the Security Council doing about the alleged violations? What has the Secretary-General of the UN has to say about it all? Certainly Clinton and Tony Blair are not representing themselves on behalf! Nor has the Security Council given them the go-ahead in terms of using arms to enforce the inspection resolutions. Russia and China have already warned they will veto any use of force. Then on what basis are US and UK, now backed by Canada and Australia, talking so threateningly. We do not see such resolution action with the other problems that plague the world — what is the interest of the US — the motives considered above....

How come these countries believe they can get away with their threats? What has happened to their much-vaunted democratic principles? There is no discernible reason for their behaving like dictators. Or have they in practice been doing just that — in the name of democracy...?

Sultan Wares Dhaka.