

Why Trivialise the JS?

BNP's keeping from the budget session of the Jatiya Sangsad on top of its track-record of parliamentary boycotts is almost taking the form of a national betrayal. The party seems to have made it into a habit of doing so. There was a saving grace this time round for some fleeting four to five days when it looked as if the party had made up its mind to attend the JS session 'come what may'.

Now the outlook gotten worse with the party not even feeling that it owes an explanation to the nation for its absence in parliament. The 'long march' fatigue apparently made them put off their attendance in parliament and now it is the 18th June hartal they are preoccupied with in a frenzied manner. The fallout of the hartal might well give them another handle to postpone their presence in parliament.

We have never tired of urging the opposition to refrain from relinquishing their right and duty to attend parliamentary sessions to make their presence felt where it is most needed rather than squander it on the streets or in arm-chair closets. Parliament is the property of the people and not of the ruling party.

If their talks with the Speaker had failed to yield results on the implementation of a previously agreed upon code of conduct that is more the reason why they should report this to the parliament and grill the violators in full public view. Regardless of what the Speaker says or does or how the ruling party acquits of itself, BNP should attend Parliament's sessions with all the home-work done to put the government on the spot.

World Cup Vacation!

Untenable things aplenty have recently been the lot of one of the nation's premier educational institutions — the BUET. But not one of them was half as outrageous as Monday's decision by the authorities to close the university for nearly a month — so that its students could enjoy the World Cup TV replays. Press reports say this has been done in response to demands made by the students.

The students had been denied of a full month's class already. And for no fault of theirs that closure came straight from the teachers' strike. A strike aimed at seeing their dear VC's resignation declined by the government. And now that the classes had resumed in force, the teachers clamp a new closure!

No educational institution has been closed just because of World Cup. All offices and business establishments are running as usual. Do the university authorities — really the teachers — feel it is only their students who are night after night remaining glued to the TV sets till the small hours?

The BUET authorities must beware of the precedent they are setting by this utterly atrocious decision. The BUET is not going to produce next month a champion soccer team. The waking hours of the students would be for sheer entertainment. This is no examination season at the BUET. Wakeful nights aren't going to hurt the students or the teachers.

Polythene Hypocrisy

We strongly endorse business community's critical view of government's decision to use polythene bags for jute packaging. A cruder instance of a suicidal decision cannot be imagined. Polythene is imperishable. Already indiscriminate use of polybags has played havoc with city's drainage system. Besides, polythene robs the soil of its fertility. And then think of the cost it is coming at! These polybags, if the government is foolish enough to stick to its guns, would rule out one of the remaining marginal uses of jute, one of our main foreign exchange earners.

The decision reeks hypocrisy too. There is precious little the government has done so far to protect the environment although there never has been any shortage of publicity hype to inform the world about its concern over environmental degradation. Not one of its projects, ranging from the drive to cleanse Dhaka's polluted air to Buriganga's contaminated water, has taken off.

This decision comes as an unassailable proof of what has long been felt by us: government is not at all serious about environment. It is a shame the criticism has come of all places from business quarters and not from government's won relevant department.

We demand the government revoke this decision immediately and save both environment and jute from a threat that can be helped.

The Summer of Our Discontent

by Nadeem Rahman

... The West throughout the last five centuries has displayed extraordinary energy — energy which has taken many forms, some good, some bad. But all this, which might have ministered to human happiness, has been vitiated by one fatal fault; the love of power over other human beings...

— Lord Bertrand Russell
A Re-awakening Of The East

Ultimately, the Cold War ended because both superpowers armed themselves into bankruptcy. There was no other nobler reason.

Closer to home, we are about to embark along a similar path. Two bombs, both ethno-religious in origin, both driven by internal political compulsions. One, delivering the wrath of Allah. The other, accepting no converts. Each determined to prove itself, regardless of the inevitable outcome.

But there is a price to be paid for every easy solution (or inescapable alternative), and history takes its pound of flesh in more ways than one. The price is paid in the cultivation of a political culture devoid of the human touch, where every issue is evaluated regardless of its cost in human lives.

Deprived of hope, God became a dirty word, and the sexual revolution the holy scripture of a fatalistic morality. These were a people not subjected to economic sanctions such as the people of Iraq.

What I cannot understand is why this ruling did not rate inclusion in the first page? Certainly this is one of the most important human rights law developments in Bangladesh in recent times. And certainly putting it on the back page does not benefit anybody.

production of world class weaponry has ensured the internationalization of all hitherto bilateral issues, most notably Kashmir.

An Indo-Pak nuclear war will effectively disintegrate South Asia as we have known it for the last half century. In Pakistan, the bomb will neither silence the MQM nor undo the Bhutto legacy. In India, with the branding of the bomb as a political cure-all, the BJP have miscalculated beyond their wildest dreams.

The West must now contemplate the horrifying specter of Muslim fundamentalism loitering the streets of western civilization, with nuclear tipped suicide pills between their teeth.

What is wrong with our politics? Is it ideology standing in the way, bifurcating the nation? Is it elusive charismatic leadership, past and present, haunting the nation? What are the options? If there are any, why these are not being examined, and some workable alternative tried?

To the Editor...

It was the people

Sir, I have been reading Dr Fakhruddin Ahmad's 'Letter from America' and respect his right to his opinions. However, he is factually off the mark when he says (the 16 June issue) that 'Pakistanis grabbed Abdul Ghaffar Khan's NWFP through coercion.'

The statement is wrong historically as well as in principle. NWFP was as Punjab was Khizar Hayat Tiwana's or Kashmir Shaikh Abdullah's. It was the people who decided and NWFP became a part of Pakistan in the same manner as Sylhet is today a part of Bangladesh — through referendum.

Karam Elahi
High Commissioner of Pakistan to Bangladesh

Thinking about the people?

I fully endorse your views regarding our politicians both in power and in opposition over their style in reacting to the national budget. Every year budget comes and goes, common people find little interest and meaning in it, superfluous comments made by our politicians within minutes of its announcement it becomes cheaper. Thus the whole budget affair becomes a farce and trifling matter.

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Helping humanity

Sir, It was with great satisfaction that I read the DS report of the High Court ruling against the reprehensible practice of 'safe' medical procedures. This practice is completely opposed to all notions of human and civil rights, as it results in the jailing of people who have not been charged with, or found guilty of any crime.

Furthermore, it leaves innocent women at the mercy of the police, which is unallowable if we have learned anything from

The poor's pie

Sir, While I have total abhorrence and condemnation for the authorities responsible for the supply of electricity, and full sympathy for the hardship for the letter writer (It's Dark Age, I'm sure. Salma B Aanam, May 30, 1998), I will ask her to spare a thought for another group of resident of Bangladesh — those who are homeless and has to live on the streets.

Aator Aali
USA

Why more autorickshaws?

Sir, Thank you for your first leader on the above subject published on the 20th May '98. With an utmost sense of unmitigated joy and satisfaction go for applauding the Prime Minister for accepting a hard fact that like previous government, her government also could not do anything good in the electricity sector during their two years of governance.

M Ali
Dhaka

Why Kosovo is in a curse?

Sir, The conflict in Kosovo is now turning to a full scale war. More than 1/3 of the territory of Kosovo is involved in war operations. Many civilians are being killed everyday, many villages are being burnt. The regions that are being attacked by Serbian aggressors are in a total blockade. There is a lack of food and medicines and there is a risk of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Another category of people who need help are students from attacked areas who study in Prishtina and that either cannot get back to their homes or don't have where to go because their houses are ruined

Tasruddin Ahmed
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diating peace, as it did in Tashkent after the '65 war. But Russia today, is dying of internal hemorrhage. The prognosis, it would appear, is grave.

With mankind to continue with dignity, the West must rethink its diplomacy of duplicity and double standards. England as head of the Commonwealth has shown its nationhood of shopkeepers and kept intact the interests of British trade and industry against all odds. America as self-appointed savior of democracy, must match words with nobler deeds than its archives would admit (a list of US-sponsored dictators and CIA inspired coups comes immediately to mind).

OPINION

Whither Politics?

All thinking citizens are very much concerned that our politics is not being cultivated in the proper manner, and the politicians, a very important section of the community, have continued to fail to deliver.

Thus the nation is hostage to two maladies: the transparency of the elections, and transparency in good governance. The '90s have been turbulent, and there are no signs of normalcy returning soon. Who are the scapegoats?

The politicians are building up a negative image, and it will be difficult to erase it quickly. The public mood is unpredictable, especially in a society not very sensitive to overtures of discipline and sense of duty. The times are sensitive, bad, and ominous. One triggering action may be enough to render the situation uncontrollable, as it happened in 1990 and resulted in the fall of autocracy. This time it may be quicker.

For whose benefit? These

Patience is Running Short...

Politics in Bangladesh is hostile confrontational passionate and brittle. Tough politics of hard politics? The latter is brittle, and breaks up or disintegrates. Since there cannot be a vacuum, new environmental situations grow up where the time is ripe.

At present, there are two major political parties, with adolescent democratic background. Maturity is not even hiding round the corner. The projected scenario in the very near future reminds us of the 'mancha' days the nation witnessed prior to the last general election. The mood appears to be ominous: 'What you can do, we can also do; and, may be, do it better.'

In India the Congress ruled

Electrical Power: The Human Side

The government is desperately trying to grapple with the severe shortage of electrical power in the country (partly technical and partly artificial and human), and the press is fed constantly with certain angles of information to assuage the public. But some key weak points in the whole system are not being spotlighted adequately.

Alif Zabr

The whole publicity campaign is based on the technical side, the generation, the repairs and maintenance, and on transmission. There are several areas for improvement in the operation, management, and distribution side, about which awareness campaign is necessary.

The human systems loss is a term now well understood in this part of the world. Inefficiency is not a mysterious bug or virus, and its presence can be analysed and explained, and corrective action taken through management expertise; unless, of course, the policy-makers are not above board.

The best technical system in the world will not work properly unless run or operated in the right manner (known as standard practice). It is not merely a matter of having trained and experienced staff. The sense of duty and professional loyalty have to be inculcated and so in-built. The question of bribery and corruption, malpractices and nepotism have to be faced squarely in the open; otherwise the overall efficiency will not increase even with the installation of additional generating units (what is the point in outputting the new sets with one-third human systems loss?).

The mismanagement of the electrical sector is a part of the general sickness prevailing in the public sector. All are aware of the shortcoming, but few can tackle the situation successfully; because dealing with a large mass of bad and corrupt persons cannot be carried out in a simplistic manner, as is done with a piece of machinery — remove the unserviceable component and replace it with a new one. Increasing the internal efficiency is always an unpleasant task for any management and to policy team, because the whole establishment has to be shaken up, including the platform in which the reformers are standing.

grace and compromise. Germany must be permitted to be Germany again, cleansed of guilt, despite the efforts of the erstwhile Allies. In the East, Japan must accept leadership (as indeed it has) in strengthening Asian economies. China must come to terms with the winds of change and its Western acquired philosophy of counter-capitalism. And last but not least, mother India must learn to let go, in order to reunite her family.

Humanism must prevail if humanity is to survive. When Vice President Nixon asked India's first Prime Minister what he wanted most for his country, Mr Nehru replied 'Give us a generation of peace'. Since then, India has fought four wars with two neighbours in as many decades and twenty years of non-alignment were thrown to the winds in seeking American assistance against the commu-

An Observer

for half a century since the independence of the country. In Indonesia, two leaders successively ruled the country for a similar period. Lee Kwan was example in Singapore. In Bangladesh, a similar rhythm could not be established, as the creation of Pakistan intervened in the historical process.

Perhaps the two major parties have missed the chance, and the day dreams will not turn into 3-D reality. Chasing dreams might be dangerous in some cases, and hurt a lot of people, unless statesmanship intervenes.

A minister have frankly warned that the present bureaucratic set-up and mentality cannot deliver the goods, to enable the tired baby nation to take-off. A former finance minister saw no political consensus during the next decade.

Break bones, or be supply yielding (malleable)? Our political leaders are still in the mind-trap of building up a superstructure without the proper base or foundation. In a deltaic region, jowar-bhata (flow/ebb tides) is the rhythm of life. How to make the democracy of the temperature zone harmonise with the local currents?

Few lead, but many wait. They have seen enough fruitless years. Patience on all fronts is running short. It is a trying period for the nation.

More than the technical...

More than the technical problem to be tackled first, and that too firmly. In the private sector, there is accountability at the lower working levels (the companies cannot run at a loss).

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nist Chinese. In all fairness, at least three of the wars were defensive. But the mood is considerably more aggressive now, and in much the same manner, the nascent Gujral doctrine has been cast aside like a candle against the wind. The time has come for us to echo the words of Fundit Nehru to the current incumbents of Indian leadership and the guardians of Mahatma Gandhi's legacy.

We are passionate Orientals and restraint is not in our nature. Our war machine is not equipped with the sophisticated checks and balances of the West. Our decisions are emotional, personalized and totally without accountability. Thus the words of Bertrand Russell, quoted above, ring truer than ever before. Lord Russell, who was a dedicated anti-bomber, wrote this essay at the height of the Cold War, when both Eastern and Western Europe lived in constant fear of a nuclear holocaust. He placed a good deal of hope on the re-emergence of the East and Eastern values. In the context of war and peace therefore, particularly in this, the summer of our discontent, a re-awakening of Eastern virtues and traditions of tolerance, is all the more essential. Let us do to ourselves, what others could not do to us. Time is of the essence. The final countdown has begun.

Unfortunately, nuclear power, like money, is of no use to anyone, when safely secured in underground vaults. It dares the gambler in us, and considering what manner of men we are, I feel confident that sanity will not prevail.

backed by experience.

The developmental progress of Bangladesh was nipped in the bud when it was nearly on the way to take off. The private sector is flushed with the taste of success and money, and would not brook delays and negative politics (the BOMEA is in a very hostile mood vis-a-vis the banking sector). The economy can be turned around with united leadership. But, everywhere, people face the political stalemate, day in and day out. Patience should not be allowed to reach the point of no-return; it is not good for anybody.

Merely party leadership is not enough. All-round statesmanship is the need of the hour. What we witness in contrast are continued bickering and the play of divisive forces, right from the campus onwards. Non-political workers are being used for political work. Is it fair? Who pays the price of this type of substitution?

Have the politicians realised that the present situation is very nearly at the point of going out of their grasp and control? Then what? Let us spend some time on perspective reappraisals, than remaining busy and working overtime on the petty day-to-day problems. What is the value of party consolidation when the country's political stability is at stake? Nothing new has been pointed out in this petition of protest.

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