

Why Not Mourn the Day?

From the newspapers it would appear to be a children's festival, their pages aglow with series of photographs of the happiest and comeliest faces in the world. Well, it's the SSC festival. But this could be as well a day of national mourning. This year 52 per cent of the lakhs that took the examination have failed and they are in mourning. The nation could join them rather than the bright-faced successfals — for the result represents the worst losses to the nation. It is a waste amounting to billions in taka terms. But in the far more important terms of lives impaired it is a waste beyond comprehension and worthy only of one's feeling outraged and ashamed at the same time.

The nation hobbles, struck by a 30-plus systems loss in electricity. What state the nation if struck every year by the plus-minus 50 per cent systems loss at the SSC level?

Schools are not schools and teachers are not teachers. With billions under the education head, how little is spent on education proper or the thing that goes between the teacher and the pupil in the classroom? These are rules of Bangladesh's education up to the secondary level, with both glorious and dubious exceptions, of course.

And at the apex, the whole secondary system is very erratically led. The ever-changing examination policies and syllabi have seen the rise of the coaching centres and the guide-books and teachers earning fabulously tutoring their pupils but out of the classroom. Pupils passing the exams by memorising answers to some selected questions and never as much as seeing the text-book, have been landing jobs as teachers for many years now. After police, the many top education offices are the worst places of corruption allowing fictitious teachers and schools to thrive into perpetuity. A circle as vicious as can be.

We have been steadfastly denouncing two things. For God's sake, give up this 'combined merit list' thing. This is foolish and must go. For years the main two courses offered at the SSC level were termed Science Group and Social Science Group. Humanities was banished and replaced by the latter nomenclature. Why? Lack of people educated enough to respond and act? At the multi-billion juggernaut of a plant supposed to churn out education?

Satkhira Still Simmering

What is happening in Satkhira? We are worried. Seven days have gone by since trouble erupted in Baburabad, Bhanganmari, Atshobigha, Nawapara, Jagannathpur and Chandpur following police firing on agitating landless peasants in Baburabad but normalcy has not been restored in these villages yet. Villagers fearing major trouble and more bloodshed are reportedly fleeing these hamlets for safer shelter. Worse still, local police administration has been affected by the turn of events so much so that the chain of command in the law enforcing agency has reportedly broken down.

On 27th of last month police apparently at the instigation of the powerful shrimp hatchery owners of that area tried to evict landless peasants from a vast stretch of khaas farmland earlier falsely registered in the government records as jalmohal or water body. Unable to eject the helpless but united mass, police opened fire that left one killed and many injured. Angry mob which staged processions with the dead body of Zaheda, one of the alleged four dead in police firing, attacked the government offices around demanding the removal of local DC and SP and arrest of the magistrate who gave the shooting orders.

And now there is this deafening silence from those who had threatened Milosevic. Changing tune completely in the face of Milosevic's murderous onslaught, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recently indulged in philosophical pontification: 'negotiation is the only way'. The doomed Kosovar old lady should volunteer to negotiate with the Serbian thugs before being shot to death? Switzerland, of Nazi gold hoarding fame, outdid the rest of the West recently by banning the Kosovars living in Switzerland from sending money to their dying relatives in Kosovo! It is clear that the West is once again much more concerned about the Kosovar Lib-

Sonali Gets Bronzy

Sonali Bank, UK with its six branches, has just managed to keep its nose above water. Looking almost like a pariah before the no-nonsense British banking laws it has escaped a total closure by agreeing to slough off the label of a bank and operate as Sonali Finance Company instead. Its nomenclature lustre has dulled into bronze.

The bank-turned-finance company will be debarred from taking in deposits from individuals and advancing loans to them but shall be required to return all the individual deposits previously made with the Sonali Bank which remain fully guaranteed by the government of UK. The Finance Company will be licensed only to do business with government and corporate bodies. In its reduced but streamlined role, the Bank of England assesses, the Sonali remnant could be profitable presumably because it won't be attenuated by the corrupting and addictive bad lending preoccupations.

As Sonali had sown, so has it reaped. And, when The Daily Star ran a story on the dubious UK operations some time ago, it drew a prompt reaction from the headquarters here feigning things were okay. But who did not know Sonali Bank, UK had been ailing for long, a virtual cripple on a crutch — all due to the deadweight of accumulated bad loans given away to favourites on unprofessional and, largely, political considerations. The domestic default culture exported to the UK stood no chance of any lenient circumvention in the host country. British banking laws being what they are — strict and depositor-friendly — the axe fell on Sonali, UK.

The loss of our image, we think, can be only made good by an early publication of all the defaulters' particulars, institution of a thorough investigation into the scandal and punishment of the culprits.

Our Police Force: To Whom are They Accountable?

by Monirul I. Khan

When the organised social forces like the police or the underworld gangs kill, for instance, Rubel the voice of the civil society crackles. Can civil society stop such heinous acts? Can they resist the possible violence when their voice is raised against injustice? This is a crucial question and the test for civil society in Bangladesh.

RADICAL theorists may argue that state is there to protect the interest of the ruling class, therefore its different functional organs are also devoted to this goal. However, the role of police in two recent incidents presents a confusing situation with regard to the interpretation of the radical theory. At Satkhira, police swooped into action and killed the landless who were resisting the leasing out of government land to the well-off shrimp cultivators where they (the landless) were putting up for a long time. It is not difficult to understand that the police protected the interest of the powerful class in society at Satkhira. But how to account for the arrest and subsequent killing of Rubel — a promising university student. Rubel came from a middle class family who are not isolated from the dominant class of society. Educated middle class play very important role to protect the interest of the dominant class. Sometimes the educated middle class become inseparable from the dominant class when several of their members come to occupy pivotal positions in society. Then why the police went against their class allies? Was it political? Was it the expression of the conflict of different cliques of the ruling class? It could be possible were Rubel a member of some political party. But his political association either remained unknown or could not be established. This gives the opportunity to reflect on the function of police in a more objective manner.

Is Police Independent?

At Satkhira the way police acted was not inconsistent with the established norm. They behaved as they were directed. They executed the administrative order? It was not their concern to take care of the following point — was it justified to harm the interest of the landless and protect those of the already well-off? It was the responsibility of the administration to look into the interest of the poor. Therefore, one cannot strongly admonish the police for their role at Satkhira. Was there any excess on their part? That is subject to investigation. But again the issue of excess is marked by ambiguity. Once the police is directed to take stern action then raising the question of excess renders irrelevant.

vant. The gradual unfolding of a tense situation may lead to a serious consequence. What was needed was a priori thought. If someone was to be blamed for Satkhira incident it was less police than the administration. However, the solution does not lie only in changing the class structure of society. It has been found several times in history that the very changing of class structure required efforts of several years, of course not very pleasant, easy and free of social cost. In the societies where it took place (i.e., changing social structure through radical political programmes) different types of problems cropped up in the way of bureaucratisation. What has to be tried is to change the class behaviour of the state by activating the marginalised class.

Rubel's incident indicated that police went to the extent of acting on their own. Apparently, there was no instruction from above to this effect. A group of detective branch police arrested him, tortured to recover arms from his alleged possession and killed him eventually as reported later. Should we say that the chain of command in police administration has weakened? Have they developed own interest independent of the state? Of course it is difficult to subscribe but scores of events (alleged rape of the wife of an industrialist by a police officer at Uttara, the rape of Sima in police custody, the rape of Yasmin by police, alleged indifference to contain rising crime in society) point to a fact that police has developed own interest — pecuniary and political both. If it is true even to the slightest extent one has to probe the cause(s) and consequences(s).

Politics and Police

The ruling cliques in society are locked into multi-pronged conflicts among themselves and its consequence affect the function of police. When the police is used by a political party to materialise certain political goal a great mistake is then committed. It amounts to torpedoing country's laws at the risk of endangering the guiding

principles of police action. It also gives the police opportunity to establish their political allegiance than functional adherence. For example, the task of fighting criminals and containing crime relegates as a functional goal to appeasing the political regime. If the professional acumen of police is judged less by honesty and efficiency than political allegiance the possibility of police acting out independently becomes imminent. When this happens the moral power of the political regime becomes weak. It fails to punish corrupt bureaucrats, remove inefficient people from administration or to make the functional institutions properly operative. In brief, the chain of command in police breaks down when there is repeated political interference and the weak chain of command implies the members of this community may act independently.

When crime and politics mix up then what room is left for the police to act upon? It splits up the role of police. Being intelligent the police then does not disturb the political equation of the society by diligently protecting the class and the ruling party interests. But smartly they ensure their return on it, primarily pecuniary and secondarily political (i.e., asserting power). It is possible that Rubel's killing involved both.

The talks on the rule of law, justice or honesty lose their credence to the police when political equation decides what will be the fate of a criminal. It makes them ambivalent, corrupt and possibly frustrated. Acting independently, realising pecuniary interest, asserting power where possible, all such acts on the part of the police may be interpreted as their coping mechanism with the politicisation of the police. So long as the goal of politics and the interest of the society would remain separated we would possibly be deprived of witnessing an accountable police force.

Politicisation of Human Rights Issues

Yasmin was raped by the po-

lice during the period of previous political regime and Seema underwent the same fate during the period of present political regime. The political opposition of that time did not spare a single opportunity to humiliate the administration in the eyes of the people as neither the opposition at present. Both trumpeted human rights and castigated its gross violation. How much are they serious on it yet to be proved. There is negative indication. If it is used to gain politically then the whole objective will be turned upside down. One should not forget that as a social force the police enjoys certain amount of autonomy and they are smart enough to use this autonomy. They can flex their muscles to materialise own interest, cover up misdeeds and lock into tussle of power with the administration. They may decline to cooperate, resort to dilly-dally techniques to humiliate the government.

On the other hand, it is not at all possible to dispense with them even when they are utterly inefficient. It may even be wondered, would there really happen much to crimes were there no police in our country. Some skeptics observe that things would have been the same since the role of police is negligible in containing or preventing crimes. It is the natural process that contains crime (a la Hobbes). When everybody is vulnerable to/afraid of the consequence of crime then there is deterrence (like nuclear deterrence). When police acts in a partisan manner the parity breaks and the criminal gets upperhand. It may sound ridiculous to dispense with police but may merit attention in future to re-define their role. How crime is contained in our society? Owing to police or the process of nature — a difficult question indeed.

Police will be serious not to transgress human rights when they will find that the political parties mean it. They are nayheretical about it rather cherish it as a social goal. When the political parties use human rights issues for party interest

instead of its promotion, it becomes a farce. There is a trend that a party outside power is serious about human rights, but while in power, forgets it. While in opposition its preservation matters to them since they may also become the victim of its violation. In power its violation is heuristically important.

Close study may show that the police make fun of the political parties' attitudes to human rights issues. They might say that the target of the political parties' human rights propaganda is apparently the police but actually their political adversaries. Why do they (political parties) clamour for it? Because the people may easily be instigated on human rights issues — they (police) might argue.

Has Police Different Goal?

While the macro analysis shows that the police functions as an instrument of the state and the ruling class, micro instances would reveal that as a part of power structure police does not fail to extract advantage out of it. For obvious reason, power has economic implication. There is the universal observation about police that their power is often negotiated for economic gain. Why? Two reasons are there: They complain of a frustration that their labour is not balanced with their economic incentives. It forces them to a low standard of living compared to many others in society. How do they cope with this frustration? Initially, by remaining committed to their profession, later by transacting power for pecuniary gain. Second reason, the practice of ideology to serve the society has lost its appeal. Power needs some societal ideology as its goal. Serving society as an ideological goal is absent now. This kind of ideology is considered as utopia!

How much success an individual makes in terms of accumulating wealth is more important to evaluate his achievement than anything else. Police as a social group is not immune to such ideological shift in so-

ciety. One has to re-think about socialisation of police force in terms of promoting the idea that they are protecting society from those who are out to break the underlying order.

Capitalist society also harbours ideology other than market. For example, welfare capitalism was created in the West to redress social imbalances out of capitalist exploitation. The notion of democratic rights is no longer amorphous in those societies, and has acquired definite meaning. In the society like ours with nascent capitalism the meaning of democratic values remains incipient. Why? Because the subaltern classes (i.e. peasants and urban proletarians) remain subject to their characteristics of being 'underdog' and disorganised. When the peasants and urban proletariat get conscious of their class interest(s) in a capitalist framework then democratic values assume more concrete shape. Satkhira incident points out such crystallisation is underway.

The Voice of Civil Society

Rubel and Satkhira incidents bring home a fact that the concepts of social security and democratic rights are still in their pre-historic formation in our society. Either we are at the stage of infant capitalism when ruling class predominates absolutely or we are circumscribed by despotic forces in a transitional peasant society. Whatever is true, we are also touched by the global civil society movement in the areas of democratic rights, environment and others. Our civil society is also nascent because of slow capitalist development and politically divided under the condition of 'competition for scarce resources.' But the interests of the divided civil society converge at certain moments. When the organised social forces like the police or the underworld gangs kill Rubel the voice of the civil society crackles. Can civil society stop heinous acts? Can they resist the possible violence when their voice is raised against injustice? This is a crucial question and the test for civil society in Bangladesh. If they succeed then it would help solve several problems besieging a nascent capitalist society with a large peasant sector.

The writer is Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Is the "M"-word the Reason for Western Inaction in Kosovo?

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Republican Congress who Starr hopes will impeach the President and remove him from the office American public elected him to twice, only because he had sex with an eager consenting adult, and lied about it. It is as absurd as 50 per cent in a country where 50 per cent of the marriages end in divorce, and one in nine married person commits adultery! Monica Lewinsky has submitted to Starr a piece of her clothing which she says is stained with Presidential body fluid. The President leaving his mark, has taken a whole new mean-

the services of the whole US government at his disposal. later, he is desperate to show something for his efforts and to redeem himself. Promiscuous Monica Lewinsky's sex life is his best bet. It is a testimony to how clean President Clinton is that the partisan Starr has not been

approval rating remains high, although most Americans do believe that he had a sexual encounter with Lewinsky. The public does not like the immunity that Starr presented Lewinsky with. That makes her an unreliable witness, they believe.

Democrats are much more pro-Israel than the Republicans. In the unlikely case of a Jewish woman (Monica Lewinsky) bringing down a Democratic Presidency, what will the Democrats do? They will find a way to blame it all on the Palestinians and the Arabs!

It is inconceivable that President Clinton will be impeached and removed from office for having consensual sex (there was no sexual harassment, certainly no assault); even for lying about it under oath. If he did it, the President should and is paying a hefty price for infidelity. Wouldn't it be poetic justice if at the end of the day, the two real culprits in the sordid saga — Tripp and Starr — both somehow end up in jail?

The American public believes that Kenneth Starr is partisan. Tripp is slimy and Clinton's sex life is none of Starr's business (although it is Hillary's) ... The public does not like the immunity that Starr presented Lewinsky with. That makes her an unreliable witness, they believe.

able to bring any charges against him this far. With five years of US governmental support and 50 million dollars, it should be possible to dig up some dirt on anyone, even Mother Teresa! The American public believes that Kenneth Starr is partisan. Tripp is slimy and Clinton's sex life is none of Starr's business (although it is

HOW many times have Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic called the West's bluff and got away with it? North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the West was all resolve and buzz only six weeks ago, threatening Milosevic with their air force and dire consequences, if he attacked Kosovo.

Having learned his lesson about Western feeling towards the Muslims in Bosnia, Milosevic completely ignored the empty threat and unleashed his forces on the civilian population of Kosovo. Already over 200,000 Kosovars out of a population of 1.8 million have been driven out from their burned homes.

And now there is this deafening silence from those who had threatened Milosevic. Changing tune completely in the face of Milosevic's murderous onslaught, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recently indulged in philosophical pontification: 'negotiation is the only way'. The doomed Kosovar old lady should volunteer to negotiate with the Serbian thugs before being shot to death? Switzerland, of Nazi gold hoarding fame, outdid the rest of the West recently by banning the Kosovars living in Switzerland from sending money to their dying relatives in Kosovo! It is clear that the West is once again much more concerned about the Kosovar Lib-

eration Army's foolhardy determination to have an independent country of their own, a Muslim-majority nation, than the elimination of the Kosovars as a people by the Butcher of Belgrade. The word is getting around that all a thug like Milosevic needs to do is to pronounce the "M" word, and the West will get out of the way and retire to the sidelines!

Muslims will rule the world someday. Our religion says so. When that time comes, hopefully the Muslims will be far more fair to the West than the West has been to the Muslims.

It is clear that the West is once again much more concerned about the Kosovar Liberation Army's foolhardy determination to have an independent country of their own, a Muslim-majority nation, than the elimination of the Kosovars as a people by the Butcher of Belgrade.

President Clinton Leaves His Mark!

THE endgame is near in the President Clinton-Lewinsky sex scandal. "Independent" counsel Kenneth Starr has given Monica Lewinsky, the President's alleged lover, complete ("transactional") immunity in exchange for her testimony against the President.

What Starr wants Lewinsky to say is that he and the President had sex, and that he lied about it under oath. Starr will then submit his findings to the

ing! Starr has promptly sent it to an FBI lab. If her story is true, not only has this trashy woman seduced the President of the United States, she has apparently preserved the stained cloth in case she needs to bring down the Presidency! Talk about protecting oneself.

Assuming the episode did take place — and let us remember that President Clinton denies it vehemently — it would not have been public if Lewinsky had not bragged about to her slimy "friend" Linda Tripp. Tripp, the Clinton-hater, en-

OPINION

The Mechanism of Hartals

A Husain

Here are some stray thoughts on hartal by an ordinary, peaceful citizen who is not an expert on hartal, nor is it his profession, but whose daily life is frequently disturbed by this nuisance for the alleged cause of freedom and democracy.

Our political hartals (followed by subsequent imitative hartals by non-political bodies and groups) are basically messages to the opponents, with the public as witnesses. The greater the indifference to the message, the greater is the intensity of the subsequent hartals ('greater movement' as it is called; as for example, what AL did for two years while in the opposition, a continuous non-stop barrage of hartal calls to deliberately provoke public nuisance effect. It is one of several points of views).

A hartal is a protest message, at a very high level of disruption, involving and affecting the non-politicians, that is the general public (ordinary strikes are internally confined to the professional groups, and these mostly are non-violent forms of protest). Why messages of protest are not heeded at lower levels of communication (according to information theory)?

The basic cause is intolerance, and indifference, and lack of respect for others' views. This attitude is not democratic, which ('democracy') the politicians drum to death; nothing at the same time that there is no democracy within the higher hierarchies of the political parties, but a sham demo democracy is staged for public show. Hartal is a virtual game played involving the spectators also;

now spiced with goondas and violence. Why the innocent should suffer? We are not fighting a civil war outside the Parliament!

Hartal as a tool of protest will continue to remain and be practised unless and until the society comes up with alternative options to hartal as a message of protest. To dilute hartals, the tolerance level has to be strengthened; and this benevolent attitude does not come easily in a have-not society, tempted by the gross disparities around involving power, money and influence. The latter group of tools are misused impudently by pious leaders, speakers, sermonisers, and self-seekers. What is the Hypocrisy Factor of our society?

Hartals will continue till the spirit and art of discipline is disciplined; the science having gone to the dogs. What is disturbing is the contaminating effect of political hartals. The virus is penetrating deeper into other sector sectors of the society, say, in the trade unions and labour forces; and additionally, abetted by the politicians. These CBAs are now challenging the very Administration (government) and speak in a sort of parallel voice. Good government should not be taught napping every now and then. Providing a handle to indiscipline is dangerous, as it returns like a boomerang.

The respect for AUTHORITY is waning away. A time may come when nobody will listen to anybody. That is the beginning of anarchy. We seem to be very close to it. This trend re-started since the beginning of

the present decade when the public movement resulted in the fall of an autocratic government.

The tragic part is that the politicians continued to use this dangerous tool of defiance during normal times, when democratic practices were supposed to be followed after the general elections. A bad habit has set in, giving birth to a vicious culture of hartal.

The damage was done, and the society is now paying for the unjustified continuation of a weapon which is to be used sparingly on special occasions. The culture of hartal has set in, and only an alternative culture can uproot it. The ball is in the court of the leaders who claim to represent the society.

The Daily Star editorials have been hammering at the issue, with disappointing response. The experts have to draw up a Check List of Pre-conditions. There are two main components: the Message, and the Medium used for communication.

Any form of hartal is the medium. There are many ways of drafting the message, however controversial or provoking. The difference of opinion will exist in human civilization, regardless of the societies involved or not involved.

The time is not yet ripe for political consensus. One legitimate alternative is a national government; otherwise the resultant of the national efforts will not go forward; or only a small component will go forward, resulting in huge systems losses, as we find at present. The stakes and the level of sacrifices called for is too high. Are our leaders ready?

To the Editor...

Harassment at ZIA

Sir, I had many occasions to be at the Zia International Airport. Recently I went there to receive one of our guests from the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, Montreal, Canada and had to see police help to recover her from the scramble by touts. The experience of harassment of an incoming passenger is horrible. Touts wait there in hundreds for their prey. As soon as a passenger steps out of the airport, touts fall upon him or her like vultures. Numerous hands grab the luggage and start scrambling. They pull and push the luggage and the person himself or herself in all directions while the passenger tries to make his or her way for some transport. In the push and shove the passenger loses his goods and valuables. The touts demand money as much as their whims permit. Even if a passenger has no luggage at all, save and except the brief case in his or her hand, one has to undergo the same trial and tribulation.

While it is appreciated that the government cannot be expected to do the herculean task of eliminating terrorism and 'tourism' in a single night from all strata of the society which have been sustained by successive governments, government cannot also exonerate itself from its failure to protect public

Managing a mill

Sir, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had nationalised the jute industry and now his daughter is de-nationalising the same.

If government cannot manage the jute mills then those should be returned to the rightful owners. If the owners are now considered foreigners even then there is no bar to return those to them, as the government is encouraging foreign investment.

The basic question remains: if the government cannot manage a mill, then how it will manage a country with 130 million people and huge problems?

A F M Moenul Islam, Chandernagore Residential Area, Chittagong

Not sportive

Sir, Many rules of football have been changed but not the penalty shootouts — I mean 'te breakers'.

Despite exercising every skill during the 120 minutes, a

team will be deprived of getting laurels of victory if the goalkeeper fails after the game. The keeper who is tensed has every reason to fail.

Why one player should be allowed to bear the burden of the entire team? The tie-breaking game is always a luck and not at all sportive.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury, General Manager, Agrani Bank, Rajshahi

Alternatives

Sir, The alternatives, a new feature in the DS is the most thought provoking, purposeful and need-of-the-day aspect for the nation. I extend my warm congratulations to the team and wish all the success of your efforts.

All good efforts, as we see, do not mostly reach the authority concern. Can I ask you to ensure to reach these valuable information to the minister, ministry and the departments concerned and tell them to send you a feed back of their remedial measures they have undertaken for the safety and to mitigate the sufferings and agony of the people.

Enadad Ul Haq, Ex Governor, Rotary International district 32, 143/1 New Bally Rd, Dhaka 1000