

Despicable Politics

BNP has called for another general strike, second in five days, on Thursday. We are on record to have opposed all such strikes, called by whoever and against whatever the government. All these strikes are particularly despicable because they are designed also to prolong the two-day weekly off to a three-day one. General strikes or national work stop-outs hurt the country's economy grievously. That's bad enough. But now it will hurt the drive for recovery from the losses of the flood.

The government must own a considerable share in the guilt of the Sunday shutdown. The points put forward by it for BNP to abandon the hartal plan at this delicate moment were hardly well-reasoned. Their refusal to allow the party to stage their hunger strike at their desired venue amounted to prodding them on to the strike decision. Didn't the government know that the refusal would be used to justify the strike? Only too well. And the BNP was bent on cashing in on the government inaccommodation and spurned the offer of the Osmany Udyan venue. Politicking is the thing for both and, it seems, not the nation.

It is difficult to understand what does AL gain from its policy of prevailing on the rajpath on the hartal day. It only leads to tension and violence and highly avoidable deaths and injuries. It is equally, if not more, difficult to appreciate what the Thursday hartal will avail for BNP. Sympathies from unattached persons and quarters can only start to dry up. Issues will begin to thin and discomfiting the government stand out as the main goal. That wouldn't be helpful for BNP.

Have they both forgotten that the nation's priority is economic development? It can come out riding over the losses of the great flood only at the price of a united nation's all-in overdrive. If ever the government needed unreserved opposition cooperation, it is now. If ever an opposition was needed to serve the nation this badly, it is now. Government, being government must put the first step forward to create such an atmosphere of tolerance and cooperation. AL is not doing so at the moment.

What are we having are two self-righteous unbending postures constantly harming the nation's interest. We repeat our disapproval of the Thursday hartal. Or for that matter, all future hartals.

Devaluation Controversy

As a break with piece-meal devaluation of currency we have gone for a drastic downward adjustment of Taka value to a dollar — by a neat three per cent. Although this has drawn an almost equal measure of commendation and criticism, on balance it seems to us that it just could not be helped. Its rationale basically lies there.

The 16 per cent export growth we had achieved in the last fiscal has shown signs of slackening during the first quarter of the current financial year. The negative trend needed to be rolled back by making the price of our merchandise attractive to buyers in comparison with that being offered on the international market by our export rivals.

Furthermore, the downturn in the labour markets of Malaysia, South Korea and Middle East has raised a genuine apprehension of a decline in the inflow of foreign remittances. Finance Minister SAMS Kibria has quite candidly pointed out that the outlook on both export-earning and foreign remittances warranted that we immediately bolstered them with an upward exchange rate fine-tuning that would be too weaning for the people concerned to brush aside.

At the back of the government's mind is the consideration that this would go to replenish the forex reserve and help maintain a balance in the payments situation. But the fact of the matter is import costs will rise, and with our exports having a big import content the prospective rise in export-earning could well be offset by the higher import prices. The Finance Minister's contention is that the prices of things we import have fallen in the world market so that the devaluation wouldn't affect us much. It cannot, however, be overlooked that the post-flood rehabilitation and reconstruction activities will entail imports. But again higher import prices mean increased duty collection at the ports.

The bottom line is: we must know where to draw the line. What seems worrying is that inflation could be imported into the living costs of the consumers, a prospect that the government needs to be cautious about.

Try Him

Pinochet's sin has finally caught up with him. Old age, out of power for a decade and a half, third country residence, convalescence from surgical operation in a London hospital, the British track-record of occasionally having hosted other erstwhile dictators — nothing, nothing at all came to his rescue. Such a human rights sinner had he been his very name raked in a derision far too deep-seated, and self-vindicating with a wealth of evidence, not to extract its price from him in law.

After engineering the ouster of leftist president Allende in 1973 he unleashed a decade of reign by death squads in cohorts with army security force cronies to silence his political opponents. A serial mayhem in which many Spaniards fell dead.

We congratulate the Spanish authorities for having sent an extradition warrant to the British government for Pinochet's arrest. And the prompt action the White Hall has allowed to be taken by the London police on the request evokes our admiration for the British system.

Our heartfelt thanks to the British government for taking a judicial, magisterial and police view of the matter as distinguished from a political line and thus cooperating most exemplarily in subjecting a former diabolical dictator to the due process of law. There cannot be a greater shame for the pride of diplomatic immunity, when taking refuge in it, a human rights violator like Pinochet tries to shrug off accountability for his crimes. He should be duly extradited for an appropriate trial, and punishment.

The Third Wayism: A New Movement of Political Thought?

by M Rashiduzzaman

Based on the available discernment, the Third Way conceptualization offers a creative mode of socio-economic relations, which may be the guiding principles of the future economy. Among the constructive ideas are the concepts of social capital that encourage "participatory citizenship and mutual respect" as the dynamics of economic affairs.

Union (15 countries) are led by the conservatives. If that is a political indicator, the center-left coalitions will rule most European countries for the next 30 years or so, according to some observers. However, it is doubtful if those new center-left governments will act like the old time left-wingers they may be no more than a pragmatic brand of social justice supporters committed to reform and willing to innovate. Except Britain, Greece, and Portugal, most of the European countries have coalition governments, and their pluralistic governance will make it difficult for the radicals to have their way.

The Ronald Reagan presidency in America symbolized the first right wing ideological shift that took the European (also some non-European) democracies by a storm when the left-oriented governments fell like the dominos, and more conservative and center-right regimes replaced them. Now after a decade plus old conservative rule, the political pendulum is swinging to the opposite direction. With nearly 41 per cent of the popular votes, the Social Democrats have become the single largest party in Germany although just shy of an absolute majority. The leftward tilt in the forthcoming German government is clear although its ultimate configuration is still unclear. Schroder is an ex-Marxist but his twin-track politics is intended to give something to every one, from the workers to the industry bosses. He promised the working class what it wanted, but he also talked about tax-break for the middle class. Most of his supporters don't expect him to cut Germany's generous unemployment benefits, attractive pension, assured vacation, and child care and health benefits. Those are evidently contradictory goals when the German economy is facing numerous problems resulting from the national reunification, a global recession and the rising unemployment.

Already the leftists are celebrating that the center-left parties are now the dominant actors in Britain, France and Germany, three prominent Western European countries. Is it a sheer coincidence that the left-leaning parties are on the rise in Europe? As of this writing, only two countries (Spain and Ireland) of the European

had won the elections, and returned to power after a long hiatus. "Such unmistakable gains have given the Third Wayers an unprecedented clout as the political winners. Based on the available discernment, the Third Way conceptualization offers a creative mode of socio-economic relations, which may be the guiding principles of the future economy. Among the constructive ideas are the concepts of social capital that encourage "participatory citizenship and mutual respect" as the dynamics of economic affairs. At the core of this principle is the mutually beneficial dialogue between the employer and employees in the knowledge-driven industries of the future. The unifying rationale of such a trusting relationship and constructive partnership that attracted Tony Blair's Labour Party is yet to be fully transformed in the real economic world. Free trade and globalization are the hallmark of the Third Way protagonists. Both in the United States and the U.K., the Third Way believers wanted to invest more in human resource development. Good schooling and job training will redistribute wealth and prosperity better than the government do, they insisted.

In the wake of the flourishing Third Way thinking, do we perceive a failure of the previous conservative, liberal and radical beliefs? Not entirely so, but partly so! Human ingenuity has known no bounds in science and technology, but in political ideas, beliefs, and institutional arrangements, nothing is absolutely fresh. Since the end of World War II, we have seen several cycles of socio-political ideologies going up and down in the non-communist countries. The Communist ideologies themselves broke down in most Marxist states; really, many presumed that the Third Way approach was the offspring of the collapsed socialism. From 1945 to the mid 1970's we saw a liberal social democratic

upsurge moving through Western Europe and North America that also touched several developing countries. Starting in the later half of the 1970's, there was a conservative revivalism that goaded the political and economic life more to the right and center right. The conservative appeal of less government and less tax accompanied by a reduction of services slowly backfired, and lost its zeal in the 1990's. Moreover, a tide of moral righteousness neglecting the questions of modern governance has overwhelmed the American conservatives. People now expect the government to do even more but with fewer taxes; in recent years the conservatives have come forward with few new ideas beyond their hackneyed free market postulations. The Third Way ideas may also be delineated as a new cycle of thought that has spawned around us over the years, but its basic tenets can be traced back to the British Liberal reformists at the turn of the century.

The Third Way is indeed a many splendoured imagination; the European Socialists and the American Democrats are not monolithic in what they want and the means they want to employ to achieve those goals. Tony Blair calls it the Third Way, but his counterpart in France (Jospin) still prefers to describe it as the old-fashioned democratic socialism, and Schroder in Germany beacons it as the New Center. In Europe, some political leaders including Schroder used it to attract the unemployed young men and women. Conservative free marketers themselves realized their need to be kinder and gentler, as George Bush put it during his first presidential campaign. The tenor of the political debates in the West has changed, and the leaders and groups that express more social concerns inspire greater public attention.

Although the politicians and the intellectuals have been wrestling with the Third Way,

and its advocates are relishing their recent triumphs, the New Center or the New Middle, as Schroder calls it, has its setbacks, and skeptics. At least Bill Clinton's political style and success inspired Tony Blair to reconduct his own Labour Party, but the Monica Lewinsky saga has bogged down the American president, and the conceptualization of the centrist political agenda is not his priority now. President Clinton's aide Sidney Blumenthal is known to be an advocate of the Third Way ideas, but with a sex scandal and an impeachment hearing hanging over the White House, the European paradigm shift will not make much headway in America. So far, the American intellectual establishments have not shown any outpouring of excitement about the Third Way thinking. If the Republicans are returned in a larger number in the November election, Washington may be the most conservative capital in the Western world!

There are clear disagreements between Prime Minister Blair and Prime Minister Jospin (France) about the social democratic utopia offered by the new paradigm. The French government's proposal to slash the 40-hour week down to 35 hours will not be acceptable to Tony Blair or Bill Clinton. Schroder's firebrand cohorts do not acclaim his New Middle ideals, and several Western leaders expressed concern about working with the Green Party partners of the Social Democrats. Holland's Prime Minister Wim Kok is only moderately leftist, and he may not agree with the new radical neighbors.

Doubts and fear about the Third Wayism as a genuine philosophical construction abound. Third Way's distinctive themes are yet to bloom, it's still uncertain if its innovative concepts can be operationalized. Both Bill Clinton and Tony Blair who nourished the new social democratic ideology are politicians, not logical philosophers. Is it a genuinely new thinking or a repackaged old political gimmick to win through the ballot boxes?

The author writes from Glassboro, New Jersey, USA

Serbia Sees Sense

by Robin Cook

President Milosevic is a master of brinkmanship. He has tried to play a game of cat and mouse with the international community. But he has lost. His policy in Kosovo will now be under strict international scrutiny.

IN the early hours of October 13 morning, NATO issued an activation order for air strikes on Serbian military targets. RAF Harriers had deployed to south-eastern Italy; American B-52s were ready to fly from the UK.

President Milosevic was left in no doubt that he could negotiate a solution now, or he could see his armed forces crippled by air strikes and then negotiate.

Richard Holbrooke, the American special envoy to Kosovo, had asked for a 96-hour delay on NATO's action, so that he could have one last try to make President Milosevic see sense with the full backing of NATO's military might behind him.

In the end, he needed less than 12 hours to finalise the deal.

President Milosevic has agreed to comply with UN Security Council resolution 1199. This was the key demand of the six-nation Contact Group. It means a ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and the return of Serbian security forces to where they were before

the appearance of compliance during the past few weeks, his troops were committing atrocities. If the agreement is to stick, it needs to be properly verified. That is why we have agreed that up to 2,000 international verifiers will be sent to Kosovo. They will be checking compliance in every corner of Kosovo, assisted by NATO reconnaissance flights overhead. They will guarantee transparency — the most basic requirement for building peace.

The observers will not be armed. They are not there to enforce the agreement. They are there to verify that its terms are being complied with. They will have the weight of the international community behind them. NATO's unity and resolve is a warning to Milosevic not to obstruct or harm them.

But President Milosevic's commitment to the agreement is only as strong as the force which persuaded him to sign up to it. We are under no illusions that this marks the end of his ambitions to impose total control over the Kosovans. He knows that NATO will act if the

brutality and repression return. President Milosevic is a master of brinkmanship. He has tried to play a game of cat and mouse with the international community. But he has lost. His policy in Kosovo will now be under strict international scrutiny. We are not taking him at his word. Only actions — fully verified — will satisfy us. Having got so close to air strikes — even to the point of issuing the order — some will think that nothing short of an effective military operation should count as a success. But the aim of our policy was not to end up using force. Our goal was to avert humanitarian catastrophe, and to end the Serbian repression in Kosovo. To achieve that, it needed determined diplomacy backed up by the credible threat of force. Britain played a leading part in getting the agreement. Britain will now play a leading part in turning the agreement into a reality on the ground.

The author is the British Foreign Secretary. Courtesy: The Guardian

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

The Man with Her Heart

Sir, It was an absolute delight to read AAM Aabab's 'The Man with Her Heart' in the DS, 18th October, 1998. Thanks to the author for giving us some immense reading pleasure after a long, long time.

Joe D'Silva, Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka

The 'deadliest of food'

Sir, I am writing through you to register my horror and disgust at the tasteless advertisement from Dettol which appeared in your and other newspapers on 8 October. A fish is depicted as being the 'deadliest food on Planet Earth'. As a Britisher, eating, living and working with Bangladeshers for many years, I am most embarrassed to see that a company with British origin is the author of such a stupid and insensitive advertisement.

At a time when we are all concerned about the level of nutrition available for people severely affected by the unprecedented floods and their aftermath, fish is an essential source of animal protein as well as invaluable vitamin rich fish

oil. Bengalis from both sides of the international border are experts at knowing if fish are 'stale' or not, they never buy fish blindly — they check meticulously.

If Dettol had expressed their concern about the damaging effects of fertiliser and pesticide on fishes that have been affected by them, I would have understood the relevance of a campaign, but Dettol have seriously 'missed the bus'. Malaria and Dengue are caused by mosquitos carrying the problems and certainly not by fish. Bangladeshis know this, so who on earth composed the advert?

Julian Francis, Dhaka

Stop the universities from bleeding

Sir, I congratulate Mr. Abdul Bays for his article entitled 'Why Should Universities Bleed?' and Prof M Masum's (Jahangirnagar University) letter in the DS of 3 and 5 October, 1998, respectively. I congratulate the Vice-Chancellor Dhaka University, for addressing to the issue for the first time.

I take the opportunity to add a few more points in this regard. The total budget of the universities would show that on average about less than 40 per cent are spent for imparting ed-

ucation i.e. for paying salary of the teachers and of the ancillary staff and for providing with the minimum facilities needed for teaching as the library, laboratory etc. The students do not pay even the cost of the bulbs they use in the name of hall residence fee. They get water, electricity, gas free and so they are more interested to continue their stay in the residential halls as long as they can manage.

The consequence is obvious, namely, session jam, involvement in unhealthy politics etc. Our universities keep a huge administrative staff, which means unnecessary cost for their salary. In any university in the western countries, a small administrative staff does the job very efficiently. At last little money is left for imparting the EDUCATION for which the universities are established.

I conclude, I would say that modern education which is supposed to mould, build and change the male letters were is not cheap. So the nation must find the ways to stop the universities from bleeding.

Prof Dr Kh M Mannan, Dhaka University

BBC and CNN should be resumed

Sir, Mr O H Kabir's letter requesting to resume telecasting of BBC and CNN programmes in view of great public demand was published in DS on October 7, '98. After the BTV suddenly stopped telecasting these programmes, viewers became disgruntled and many letters were published in different newspapers expressing grievances and requesting to telecast BBC and

CNN programmes, but it seems that all was in vain — the government remained indifferent to people's pleas.

It is very puzzling why the authority decided to stop telecasting of these programmes. Is it because it was started in the BNP regime?

By stopping BBC and CNN programmes the authority has done a grave mistake because every time people miss it they remember the past days when they were able to watch these programmes. So, it will be wise to resume telecasting of these programmes immediately.

Nur Jahan, East Nasrabad, Chittagong.

Atrocities on women

Sir, There has, of late, been a very sharp increase in atrocities on women and children including minor girls.

No society can claim to be a civilised one with such things going on almost unchallenged. We are aware of some cases being filed by the police, some local adjudication etc., but has any of these deterred the incidence of the crime? In fact, we noticed an increase of it as reported in newspapers.

In addition to rape, the other reason has been demand for dowry which has led to hundreds of death during the last one year or so in the country. How many punishments for such crimes have been announced is another sad story — virtually none, compared to the number, nature and gravity of the crime. Have our law and order and the judicial system totally failed? Who will answer? Added to all these is the JU

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

The \$50 Million Wish

IT is now estimated that the Starr investigation has cost taxpayers \$50 million. My friend Volani says that is not chopped liver.

Volani said that there were so many things you could buy for \$50 million — rather than spend it feeding a half-dozen grand jury rooms. A group of us were out fishing for smoked salmon, and we pressed Volani as to what he would rather spend \$50 million on.

He said, "two tickets to a Celtics basketball game."

Torgenson said, "I'd rather use the money to have lunch at the Four Seasons restaurant in New York."

Bergstrom was more practical. "You can still get an Armani suit for \$50 million and have money left over for a pair of Ballo shoes."

I said, "If I had \$50 million I would fly first class on Continental Airlines, something I could never afford before."

Zion, who is the joker of the group, said, "I'd buy \$50 million worth of Powerball lottery tickets."

Stone said, "I'd use the money to hire a lawyer to defend myself against Linda Tripp."

Treiber, who was at the helm of the boat, said, "If I had \$50 million, I would give it to my wife so she could afford to divorce me."

The consensus on the boat was that Starr required too much money to bring the country to its knees. Even when he got Monica Lewinsky to sign, the taxpayers didn't see that they were getting their money's worth. If Starr had gotten the goods on Clinton for a land deal in Whitewater, no one would complain about the bills.

But trying to pin a crime on the president for what he did behind closed doors of the White House is not worth more to the taxpayers than \$12.50.

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are not being discussed in seminars (we have excessive seminars on other topics).

The former installations are subject to severe human problems (maintenance of overhead and underground lines, rent-seeking devices; as also natural causes as floods). The BTB carried out more than one foreign consultancy survey, but the recommendations are not coming out of the files.

Why the BTB cannot be tamed, if that is the hidden problem, when the ministry is headed by a powerful minister? It is not possible for the Prime Minister to intervene in every issue to get things moving in this bogged land, where the natural flow of the rivers are also impeded for mysterious reasons (FAP?).

Transparency is badly missing in the telecom sector. The private investors are eager and ready to queue up to develop this sector, but the go ahead signal is being withheld for one reason or another. It is not the shortage of funds in the public exchequer, because private investment in tie-ups will overflow (as it has done in the cellular mobile sector, but the operation service is poor due to lack of technical infrastructure in the BTB). The BTB human and technical systems have to be overhauled and modernised.

The rate of progress is so dismal that it would take a decade to get a phone connection on demand. The official policy has to be market-oriented and suited to the demand curve. The current and past delays cannot be explained satisfactorily to the public.

A Zabr, Dhaka