

We Oppose Hartal

Hartalocracy is on a come-back trail, the gnawing longer version of forced civic standstill, we mean. Caught up in a continuous 60-hr whirlwind of a BNP edict for the first time since 1996 general election, we disconcertingly look on a definite down-turn in the confrontational hiatus between the opposition and the ruling party.

We question the whole logic of hartal now as we had done it before. For it is an article of faith with us to oppose it as an anachronism in free and democratic Bangladesh. If the purpose is to protest the 'oppressive' nature of governance and show how repressive the government could be then why must the opposition let loose its own variety of an oppressive imposition of their will upon the citizens.

Granted, the government by their behaviour on November 7 provoked the opposition into a reactive gear, and the former has drawn our flak for the same in our earlier comments; but that is hardly any acceptable reason why our life and living will be throttled for full two days.

What is a political party worth if it does not strike a difference with another political party? Begum Zia, you are not showing any new path, you are doing what your predecessor did as far as hartal calls go.

Let's place it on record again that the present government is not helping matters much by their attitude to the opposition. We have been watching with some trepidations that what they do tend to harden the BNP position. The ruling party needs to rework its political vibes.

Show the Way, FBCCI

Despite having a fairly liberal policy towards investment, both local and foreign, the economy continues to suffer from a dearth of new ventures, particularly in the industrial sector. A variety of reasons is usually cited to explain the problem, but even within such obvious constraints, there are surely possibilities which the business community, particularly new investors, can exploit.

Recently, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina raised this particular issue with the newly-elected office-bearers of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI). The prime minister called on the FBCCI to come up with new ideas for investors and assist them to exploit untapped areas, particularly in agriculture.

The opportunities that agriculture-based industries offer cannot be over-emphasised. Fertility of the land and labour of the people could be turned into the country's most lucrative natural resources, if the business community came forward to exploit their vast potential. The government is already pledge-bound to provide necessary infrastructural supports. The business community could play its due role through identifying new areas for investment and making an effective information and advisory service available to potential new investors.

Central American Tragedy

It is nearly impossible to imagine what happened in Central America when Hurricane Mitch hit the region and a vast part of a mountain fell on the populated foothills. The geomorphology of the zone comprising Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador has changed with deep sheets of mud covering crop fields and highlands under water for the first time. As if the whole vista has been sculpted anew.

The disaster took a toll of about 15 thousand lives in its first strikes. The toll is now to swell with an inevitable spread of cholera and malaria. This part of the disaster is so familiar to us in Bangladesh. Over the recent years it has been possible here to contain epidemic deaths far below feared deaths. But the stricken Central American countries — home to fantastic scenic beauty — are unlucky in that the terrain, which is formidable as it is, has now been reduced to being absolutely forbidding. For the most part the highways do not exist now. And bridges have left signs only of their former existence.

Add to this the fear of an ecological disaster taking over the region. Ecology is a matter that changes with imperceptible slowness over aeons of time. If change that may take place in a hundred thousand years is pressed and rushed to occur almost overnight, how will man cope with it? Our heart goes out to the affected nations and their victim populations. It would be very meet for Bangladesh not only to send sympathy but also some token relief and a medical team.

THE LEGAL PROFESSION
Fighters for Freedom, Human Rights and Justice

by Dr Kamal Hossain

As our societies move forward, as they must, in pursuit of multi-dimensional development — political, economic and social — the legal profession must rise to the challenge of playing its strategic, pro-active role — as "legal freedom fighters," as "people's lawyers" to protect the people's interest, to defend their basic human rights, and at all times to uphold the rule of law and the dictates of justice.

OUR self-image is shaped by the traditions set by our exemplars and role models, who are remembered and respected as fighters for freedom, for human rights and for justice. The great South African judge and jurist, Albie Sachs, described the lawyers needed in the new democratic South Africa as "legal freedom fighters".

For successfully in the face of persistent threats and pressures — protesting an influential police officer charged with the murder in police custody of a young man. As AG he was entrusted by the Caretaker Administration with the task of prosecuting the corrupt former President who had been removed from office by a popular movement for democracy.

I believe I would be expressing a view shared by all of us in asserting that we regard the role of members of the legal profession to be that of "legal freedom fighters." This role assumes critical importance as our societies strive to achieve economic and social transformation through a democratic process. This is an ongoing process in

whose interests the law fails to protect. This harsh truth was confirmed by none other than the President of the World Bank in his address to the Joint Bank-IMF meeting earlier this month when he reported as follows: "While focusing on micro-economic numbers, or on major reforms like privatization, we have ignored basic institutional infrastructure, without which a market economy simply cannot function."

The situation in our societies has been made even more challenging by the impact of globalization. The absence of effective regulation of the market and the chronic weakness of law enforcement, coupled with the new ethos of pursuit of fast and easy money and maximizing of private profit, have tended to create a "free for all" condition. This has allowed grave malpractices, such as unbridled currency speculation and fraudulent transactions involving banks and stock exchanges to take place.

Major disputes have arisen in our region out of contracts involving oil and gas development, and setting up of major power plants — which have become the subject matters of international arbitration. While developing these capabilities we will need to guard against the prevailing ethos which might encourage the new breed of lawyers "to optimize the clients' outcome by any means."

He counseled young lawyers: "Advise a client what he should have, not what he wants" drawing attention to the enormous power of large corporations, which needed to be guarded against. A recent study by an American academic on Lawyers and Justice draws upon Brandeis to urge that lawyers when discharging their tasks should be imbued by a sense of "moral activism".

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Stunning Democratic Gains in the Election Lets President Clinton off the Hook

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

There was a time when President Clinton would have bent over backwards to accept a congressional censure to save his job. After November 3, he may hold out for no punishment at all!

THE conventional wisdom was that in this off-year election, President Clinton's job was on the line. In the election, it is the Republican Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, who is in serious danger of losing his job to his soul-mate, GOP Congressman Bob Livingston.

The overwhelming reason for the Republican electoral debacle was their unwillingness to listen to the American public. For months, polls showed that the Americans were fed up with the Lewinsky episode, did not want Clinton impeached (censured, yes) and were unhappy with the partisan way the Republicans were approaching impeachment. Through it all, Bill Clinton's approval rating remained over 60 per cent, and Congress's around 30 per cent. Yet, the Gingrich Republicans were salivating at

gained notoriety by literally singing Kenneth Starr's praise on the floor of the House in July: "Twinkle, Twinkle Kenneth Starr. Now we know how brave you are. We could not see which way to go. If you did not lead us so, Twinkle, Twinkle Kenneth Starr. Now we know how brave you are."

The biggest loser was not on the ballot: Kenneth W. Starr of McLean, Virginia. It was he who prompted many, including the writer, to vote early for candidates opposed to him. In the writer's congressional district, Rush Holt, a doctorate in physics and the former assistant director of Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory sought the Republican incumbent, Mike Pappas. Dr. Holt is a friend of Princeton University's 16 Nobel Prize winning Professors, all of whom made contributions to his campaign. Mr. Pappas

Vice President, who had defeated the son of another former VP, Walter Mondale, in the primary. Upon winning, Mr. Ventura requested that from now on, he would prefer to be known as Jesse "The Mind" Ventura. Of course in Mr. Ventura's previous profession, sudden transformation from a villain to a hero was an everyday occurrence. What can one say, except, only in America!

In an interesting side bar, as the retiring Democratic Senator John Glenn was orbiting the earth on the space shuttle, his Senate seat also changed orbit, and fell into the sphere of the Republicans. NASA focused so much on showing the 77-year old Glenn's every move in space that the Japanese complained that they had not even seen a glimpse of their own astronaut. No sooner the complain was lodged, in a display of true shuttle diplomacy, live picture of the Japanese astronaut suddenly filled the television screens!

Although the Republicans are under enormous pressure to wrap up the impeachment investigations quickly, they are still trying to play it sly. Mr.

Henry Hyde, the House Judiciary Committee Chairman of the old Congress has sent President Clinton an 11-page letter requesting "yes" or "no" answers to 81 questions derived from Kenneth Starr's report. Clinton's lawyers will be in no hurry to reply. Hyde is seeking snappy answers that could be used to perjure the President. Very cleverly, the questions do not mention Presidential sex (for which the Republicans paid a devastating electoral price), but are attempts to prove perjury and obstruction of justice charges against the President. Emboldened by the election, the President's lawyers are going to point out that Mr. Starr's report is only the prosecutor's one-sided version of events. The testimony of key Presidential accusers such as Linda Tripp was not cross-examined. Starr did not even call Lucian Goldberg, Tripp's fellow conspirator, to testify in front of the grand jury. In an effort to streamline the impeachment inquiry, Henry Hyde wants to call only Kenneth Starr to testify in front of the House Judiciary Committee. Democrats are going to insist that they would appreciate a visit from Ms. Tripp and Ms. Goldberg as well. There was a time when President Clinton would have bent over backwards to accept a congressional censure to save his job. After November 3, he may hold out for no punishment at all!

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.

Reveal "secret" data

Sir, Few will disagree that our pride industry, namely garments export, is being pampered. Sometimes, the government has to bend a little too much to meet their non-stop demands at regular intervals for this and that facility. Many of these reviews are genuine, and the government have been obliging. According to a number of critics, this industry plays a leading role in pressurising the government on devaluation options.

Good news is always publicised. But some factual aspects of the 'weaknesses' of the industry may be released to the press for balanced perspective analysis and review of the huge garment industry. Very few charts and graphs are released. The annual year book is a rare sight for readers and analysts. The negative figures are required for analysis and study. Here are some examples: — overall systems loss in the industry; including specific figures in the main sub-sectors. How serious is the human system loss compared to say, that in the PDB and the Telecoms? — the management, administrative and technical efficiencies which are possible to be maintained currently (after more than a decade of experience) in the large and the smaller companies; and how this efficiency factor is creeping up? Some examples of structural reorganisations and the ensuing results. — the labour relations and amenities. Summary of independent interviews. Why the

fearlessness, honesty, fairness, neutrality... which apparently causes welling up of a deep sense of respect and fondness for the DS in his tender heart. But when it comes to plain talking by the DS about the hard realities obtainable in the manpower business in Bangladesh today Mr Mustafa spitefully accuses the DS of 'one-eyed policy'. He conveniently refuses to bear any responsibility of blames most of which is due to misdeeds done by the individuals, organisations, or syndicates without having any valid recruiting licence. The question now arises, how do these individuals, organisations or syndicates operate? Can they carry on business without the connivance, if not the support and patronisation, of the valid licence holders?

One fails to understand the relevance of democratic practices in BAIRA to the manpower export business. The writer vainly attempts to persuade us to believe, BAIRA members' prime objective in their business is not profit but the lofty ideal of patriotism and welfare of the people.

May we respectfully ask a few pertinent questions? Do you publish or openly give out the fees you charge from the recruits? Do you issue receipt for the money you charge? Do you admit that the poor people sell everything or heavily borrow to meet your exorbitant demands? Why BAIRA has no control over the agents that indulge in corrupt practice and defraud unemployed rural youths? We, however, welcome the suggestion for an RTC to be organised by the DS to discuss all the points and would also suggest that a few representatives of numerous people who lost the money to the unscrupulous agents are running from pillar to post to recover it.

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OPINION No More Hartal, Please

WE have had enough of hartal in this country in the name of political benefit. All political leaders of Bangladesh must realize by now that hartal is the most devastating weapon ruining our nation and people every way. Why should hartal always be used as a major tool of protest by the political parties is beyond our knowledge. Is it because it is the easiest way of showing protest, sitting at home, and just wasting time in some unproductive pursuits? We feel, our political leaders don't have the quality and standard of honesty and the ability to grow consciousness among the people of this country through any other form of strong political process other than hartal. Hartal, as we all know is never used as a frequent political weapon for protest, in any other country, but ours. This tells us that the others are no doubt more educated, advanced, thoughtful and concerned regarding their own country and the people. They are more than us, that the impact of frequent hartals bears only bad results, like destroying the economy and the political. And at the moment, all political leaders should know the nation do not want any more hartals.

We had enough of the hartal game. It should be banned for good. We would like to invite both the Ruling and the Opposition political leaders to sign a peace agreement to pass a bill through the elected Hon'ble Members of the Parliament to set an example that from now on no opposition political party of the country will be allowed to use hartal as its political weapon. Looking back at the history, during our language movement from 1952 and until 1971, against the Pakistani occupa-

tion forces, we had to call strikes, meetings, processions, demonstrations including, of course hartals (logically with valid reasons). But in the present context of political behaviour, we must try to change our attitude and strategy of protests in different other ways other than hartal. We must never forget that we have achieved our independence through severe bloodshed and tremendous loss of lives. It is high time, that our political leaders prove themselves to be more sophisticated in their political behaviour, so that the people of the nation can take a good lesson from them in building a strong and trustworthy political environment within the country. Very often a question rambles our minds — why do the opposition political parties of our country always take for granted that a successful hartal means spontaneous support of the general mass? We don't think this is right. Any conscious citizen of his country never ever supported any illogical hartal called by any opposition parties so far. We all know that the private car owners, the bus and truck owners, the baby taxi owners and the majority poor rickshaw pullers never came out in the street because of the fear of getting caught by the demonstrators. It is now understood that it is fear that really makes hartal success, nothing else. If this is so, then what do the nation and its people really achieve from these most expensive hartal calls? Literally nothing! Nothing positive in good sense. Rather, doing so creates a havoc all over in ruining the social and economic status of the people of this country. We are sure, any civilized person will welcome if a positive drive is taken with sincere and honest efforts of the political and civil personalities of the country in setting up an annual example for our next generations to have a clean, healthy and trustworthy political atmosphere all over. We, the general mass, very badly need some pure political education to be provided by our experienced leaders and the educationists, so that we all can make it a success in changing our destructive political attitude and behaviour in building the nation to achieve our positive goals. No hartal will ever finally us any good thing and we will never be able to achieve any positive result out of it. Rather, this process will cripple the nation day by day. On behalf of all conscious citizens, we would like to invite all the Ruling and Opposition political leaders, educationists, litterateurs, architects, engineers, doctors, government officials, industrialists, businessmen, lawyers, courtiers and finally the students to come forward and join hands to start the process of enlightening the general mass by providing appropriate political education. This is the only way that the people of the whole nation could have enough knowledge in becoming more conscious about acquiring positive political attitude and behaviour and understand clearly what is wrong and what is right, what is good and what is bad. Because of the lack of political education, we never understand our negative and destructive behaviour that we demonstrate in the name of politics in the streets during hartal. It is high time that we now try to realize — no nation would ever progress or flourish socially, politically and economically, unless the people are given appropriate and conscious political education.

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