

Congrats to PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina caught the run-away hartal problem by the scruff at her Sunday meeting with editors of national dailies and news agencies.

It should clear the deck for consensus-building with the opposition on ridding the country of hartal. BNP has the status of a shadow government waiting in the wings of power supposedly having a similar concern at the back of its mind which the present ruling party has in the immediacy of its consciousness to avert a roller-coaster ride when in power.

In fact, when the present opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia had been in power, the vehemence with which she grilled the then opposition AL for frequently resorting to hartal is very much a matter of public record which can now be laid squarely on her doorsteps.

The point that hardly needs to be overemphasised here is, if the use of hartal is fully abjured by consensus the focus of opposition politics will automatically switch on to a new set of alternative options that will help improve not only the quality of dissent but also that of governance in the country.

Prime Minister's declaration of the intent to shun hartal when her party sits in the opposition needs to be immediately seized up by the leader of the opposition. Begum Zia is expected now to make a similar statement abjuring the use of hartal. For, it is she who had originally floated the idea not so long ago. All she needs to do now is publicly reiterate her stance in response to the PM's offer and thus set the ball rolling for a cast-iron accord on the subject.

Flood's Fiscal Fallout

The havoc that the floods of July-September wrought on the economy, particularly agriculture, can hardly be over-estimated. But its longer-term impact required a great deal of careful study. The government has been a little too reticent to make an assessment of the flood's impact on economic growth.

The Bank's assessments suggest that the floods have impacted heavily on macro economic fundamentals, which had been fairly sound over the past two fiscals. Increase in current expenditure is likely to widen overall budgetary deficit to over five per cent, which Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria had successfully contained to a manageable level over the two previous fiscals.

The government has rightly chosen to concentrate financial resources on agriculture, since rural rehabilitation holds the key to economic revival. But it also needs to pay close attention to the problems of industry and commerce, since these sectors are critical for growth. Here, the importance of macro economic management cannot be over-stated. Unless it can demonstrate that macro economic fundamentals are sound, investor confidence is likely to suffer.

Antidote to Exam Cheating

Leaders of the nation's educational enterprise met on Sunday at the congenial BARD campus at Kotbari, Comilla to talk 'Corruption in Public Examinations: Remedies and Prevention.'

Although the subject matter was finding ways and means to remedy and prevent corruption in education, the minister, as reported, spoke only on the prevention aspect of unfair means at the examination halls. The scope of the subject matter thus was limited to the exclusion of corruption by education managers and teachers.

The examinations have all become cheating friendly. The syllabus, the way it is taught and not taught, the questions — all are parts of a design to entice the examinee to go for copying.

Historic Turkish-Syrian Agreement

The most remarkable point of the entire agreement is the acceptance by Syria that PKK is a terrorist organisation.

AFTER two days of intensive talks between Turkish and Syrian authorities in Adana, a town in Turkey close to the Syrian border, an accord has just been signed removing the danger of a possible armed conflict between these two neighbours.

The crisis appeared to burst out suddenly with the Turkish side taking a distinctly hawkish posture. There were troop movements from Turkey close to the Syrian border. Militant statements from the senior army commanders culminating in statements from President Suleyman Demirel threatened Syria with dire consequences, should she fail to agree to terms set out by Turkey.

Turkey wanted Abdullah Ocalan, the Kurdish leader, who has been masterminding a bitter war against Turkey, from Syrian soil, to be extradited from Syria. Turkey threatened Syria with dire consequences should Syria fail to deliver immediately. That Turkey was not bluffing became evident when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak rushed to Turkey and offered his good offices.

The accord is as follows: In the name of the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, H

E Hosni Mubarak, in the name of the President of Iran H E Syed Mohammad Khatemi, the Foreign Minister of Iran Kamal Harrazi, the Foreign Minister of Egypt Amr Moussa, brought messages in the name of Syria in the light of which in order to discuss the question of struggle against terrorism, Turkish and Syrian delegations met in Adana on 19-20 October.

In the meeting the Turkish side repeated the statement made to the Egyptian President in order to remove the tension in the relations. The Turkish side besides recalled the following points made to the Egyptian President in the light of points made by Syria:

1) From now onwards Ocalan is no more in Syria and will not be allowed to enter Syria.

2) PKK (Kurdish guerillas) will not be allowed to enter Syria.

3) From this point PKK camps are no more in Syria and will not be allowed to resume activities.

4) Many PKK have been arrested and produced before the court.

The list exists. They have been accepted by Syria.

Syria has accepted the above mentioned points. The two sides have agreed to the following points:

1) Syria will not allow any

kind of activity which could disturb the security and stability of Turkey.

2) Syria has accepted PKK as a terrorist organisation. All terrorist activities from PKK or any other source have been forbidden in the country.

3) Syria will not allow any training camp or trade activities of the PKK.

4) Syria will not allow PKK, her territory to be used for passage to a third country.

5) Syria will take all steps to prevent entry of PKK and issue instructions for control of border.

In order to implement the above decisions in a transparent manner, the parties have

d) The Turkish and the Syrian sides decided that following agreement from Lebanon, to fight PKK terrorism on a tri-partite basis.

e) The Syrian side gave a guarantee that she will faithfully implement the above decisions.

The most remarkable point of the entire agreement is the acceptance by Syria that PKK is a terrorist organisation. In south eastern Turkey, Turkey has been fighting PKK guerillas for the past 15 years and nearly 30,000 lives have been lost on both sides. Whereas the loss of lives on the PKK side is high, the number is considerable among the Turkish security forces. Turkey has put nearly 100,000 troops to combat terrorism. PKK has been killing indiscriminately and has not spared women and children. She has been attempting to sow terror throughout the area.

PKK has been carrying out a campaign all over the world and has made some headway in Europe. The Turkish offensive to win public opinion on its side appears to be bearing fruit. The last stronghold of PKK has been Syria, who has been harbouring the leader of the PKK Abdullah Ocalan for nearly twenty years. With its expulsion from Syria, PKK has received a severe blow. It is reported that Ocalan has taken refuge in Russia. Turkey has good relations with Russia and particularly in the economic field the relations have been going from strength to strength.

By taking an uncompromising tough stand Turkey has achieved a notable success.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

decided on the following mechanism.

In this connection:

a) The security authorities of the two countries will immediately set up at a high level telephone connection.

b) The two sides will appoint two additional diplomatic representatives in the respective missions.

c) The Turkish side presented to the Syrian side proposals relating to fight against terrorism and the Syrian side promised to put up the relative proposal to the Syrian authorities and inform the Turkish side of the result within the shortest possible time.

OPINION

Ponderings at the Vestibule of 21st Century

by John Arun Sarkar

However, if you are weak and helpless, you must learn to obey without any word lest you should get hit, battered and who knows slaughtered. If you are a female, it will be more degrading and painful — you get stripped first, then raped and finally slaughtered.

Where life is so cheap, one must play it very safe. A minute of mistake may bring in an ocean of irreparable sorrow.

Society, Mores and Taboos: It is a very coherent society having hundreds of strong and deep-rooted mores and taboos. One of the strongest is 'you respect your seniors no pratter what.

Unfortunately, the seniors say the nicest of things but do never what they say. Interestingly, the juniors obey them meticulously but eventually, they become the same say all, do nothing characters.

Another is 'you have to be very religious. You have to perform the rites and rituals toto as dictated by your religious gurus. If you do not practise, it does not bother the power-mongers as long as you are obedient to them. But if you are a poor man, you must perform the ceremonial religion as well as practise it i.e. you have to be patient, polite, obedient and very softie — don't worry, Almighty will reward you after death. So, don't question and don't protest.

Elites Speak: On the stage, in the public, the copycat elites simply reproduce all that they have heard from the representatives of the international agencies, nobles, the anchors of the cable lines and comperes of the talk shows.

Interestingly, the same set of people hurl the most abusive words without any visible sign of inhibitions towards their subordinates. In doing this dirty job they are very much equal to the crum dwellers who are illiterate, uneducated and deprived of all necessary amenities and as such living very substandard lives. This revelation of bad tastes of the elites possibly indicates that though a so-called wealthy class has emerged, cultural maturation is yet to come. They might have learnt to decorate

their occasions with imported flowers, but they are yet to come of age and learn to appreciate the pure beauty of the flowers without any vanity for the money spent in importing them. They buy the prize-winner book to harness their shelves but not to read.

Properties and Protection: The total lawlessness has been the rule of the day. The people in authority, of money and power can snatch away your property at mere wish. Overnight they may call you a cheat, forger, your documents false, fake and evict you from your land systematically by the hired henchmen backed by law enforcers and some manipulative efficacies of some unethical professionals.

The only protection that a helpless man in such a situation can contemplate is 'flee away, sooner better.'

The Religious and Other Minorities: Where rapes, murders, property grabbings, abductions, arson, unlawful evictions are very much everyday happenings, the religious and other minorities are the most vulnerable of the population no wonder. In the presence of a big chunk of so-called fundamentalists, without timely support of the authorities and being even betrayed by the administrations many a time, they have learnt to be excessively submissive and give in to the unjust demands of goons and musclemen very soon. When it becomes unbearable, they shift from one locality to another and finally leave the country.

Crimes and Godfathers: Bangladesh has now become the country of godfathers. Every culprit has a godfather. Whether it is social arbitration or lawful actions by the authorities, the godfathers can easily handle the situations and safely get the criminals off the hook. Crimes one may commit without any restraint if one has a powerful well-connected godfather.

Education: Degree you may obtain but expect not to learn. Teachers and tutors are there to help you get the divisions and classes. If you are a member of a cadre of a political party and can tote guns, they may also

help you go scot free by some eye-wash actions even if you have raped your fellow students on the very campus.

What's the use of learning? You need to earn, amass wealth, live comfortably. If you have good connections and a degree, job/business/money is not a problem. What else do you want? To get the things done, you may saddle on the shoulders of some poor but knowledgeable and hardworking persons and direct them. They are very good beasts of burden. Don't worry, they don't cost you much.

If you are not a good student but your parents have enough money, go abroad, obtain a degree, come back, say 'Hi, Guy, Gal, Darling, etc.' and on return to the country, you fill up a post of an Executive in your uncle's office. That's life, man.

Oh! You cannot get along with your wife, replace her. It's a poor country, girls are very cheap! There are many in waiting for your perusal.

Commerce: Our public machinery has already epitomized itself as failure. Good news! We have embarked on privatisation. All evils will go.

Thanks to our foreign benefactors. They have prescribed a wonderful alternative. And we have privatisation. There are energetic fresh graduates and an introduction of modern furniture, electronic gadgets, appliances and what not. We are overwhelmed at the first flash of brand new shiny polished floors and walls.

Now, alas! we have this default culture. The list of defaulters has been published. Most of the big mouth so called industrialists (many call them mere traders) are defaulters. Many of them own banks. Bank directors are also alleged to be defaulters.

At the very outset of privatisation, the resorting to all sorts of manipulative manoeuvres has dismayed the whole nation.

Employers/Employees: Most of the employers are reactive. They believe in the saying that 'Mother doesn't give unless baby cries!' But they always overlook the truth that mothers are not cruel beings rather they are very generous. They can't resist

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Land of the Freebie

It used to be if you wanted to earn frequent flyer mileage you flew on planes. The more miles you flew, the larger the bonus. Then, at some point, you would get a free ticket for loyalty to the airline.

But this has all changed. You no longer have to fly to get a mileage bonus. Several hotel chains now have deals where you can earn flying points just for sleeping in their beds. You can get 500 miles for an eight-hour snooze, and 1,200 miles if you also sleep there in the daytime.

I was at a hotel reservations desk the other day, and there was a pamphlet that said you can earn mileage by playing a round of golf at the local country club.

This sounded like a good deal until I received a letter from American Airlines announcing that I could earn 2,000 miles with a lifetime subscription for Deer Park bottled water.

I didn't realize how easy it is to build up mileage until I took a flight to Phoenix and got to talking to the passengers in tourist class. "How did you get onboard?" I asked a grandmotherly type. "I called my grandson in Boston," she said, "and earned 5,000 miles from the phone company."

A man next to her said, "I bought flowers for my wife to celebrate our anniversary and they gave me a ticket. Unfortunately it's only good for one person on the date of our anniversary. My wife wasn't as thrilled with it as I was."

The man across the aisle said, "I got 10,000 miles for filling up my gas tank and buying a new tire. The gas station across the street offered me another 10,000 to change my oil."

There were many passengers on board who had earned frequent flyer miles just by using their credit cards in department stores.

One passenger was given 7,000 free miles for staying in a hospital more than a week.

It seems there isn't anything you can't do to win free miles. One wonders how the airlines make any money when they are giving away so much transportation.

I asked a ticket agent, and he said, "I think we do it on volume." By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.

others, no matter how noble that appears, it is of course very faulty. This is our understanding of economics.

Civilisation: We cut the tendons and limbs. We rape our co-students. We kill/slaughter whoever opposes us. We set fire to the shrines of other faiths, we demolish the houses of believers of another religion but we are not uncivilized. If somebody braves the audacity to call us uncivilized, we surely will pass an indictment announcing a reward on the head of the arrogant person.

Disappointments make an endless list. The stepping into the 21st Century may be made an occasion to pledge to establish justice and equality and undertake some projects to improve the lot of the people.

The government and the opposition are better informed than the common men. In their speeches, they tell us all that is good and to be done. Will it be too much to expect them put their own words into action?

Gender-awareness: Though a few organisations appoint females based on equal opportunity policy, there are a few those do not recruit females by policy. Most of the private organisations do not allow even three months maternity leaves, forget other facilities essential for female employees.

As reported, females are harassed at their work places regularly. Many incidences appear in the newspapers and many more are known by words of others. Not only a garment sector, the condition is no better in many other posh offices too. Nobody has time and courage to look into them. Particularly if the harassing personnel is in the good book of the employer, the employer being a devout profit-worshipper may not hesitate to offer a few females to the altar of oppressors.

Politics and Economics: If one's partymen rape and kill, it's a stray incident and if one's opponents have done it, they are doing it systematically. One's opponents are always doing anti-people politics and one's partymen are doing pro-people politics no matter what they do. This has been the politics of Bangladesh.

One will define and re-define a defaulter to save a few or to trap a few. Some economic decisions are taken by someone's party. As such to him, it is the wisest. The economic policy of

CORRIGENDUM In the article 'Saving the Last of Our Hopes' by Brig (Rtd) M. Abdul Hafiz published yesterday the word 'teachers' erroneously printed in the sentence 'It is a permanent slur ... ground for their prey' in the middle of the fourth para should be 'learners'.

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.

Village telephones and national policy

Sir, The brief report on the field research evaluation on the sociological and economic impact of village telephones, carried out on Grameen mobile cellular phones in the villages, in association with a German research agency (DS, Beneath the Surface column, Nov 7) deserves to be widely publicised at home and abroad, for evaluation, implications, and identifying policy strategies and options.

GB has been modest about it, and keeping a low profile (further in-depth studies will take time); but the government, BTB, and the independent agencies should assess the situation for the information of the

com Policy should be a hot document, as a lot of time has already been wasted.

A Zabr Dhaka

Italian agriculture

Sir, It is gathered from the special supplements published in different national dailies on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Italy that less than 10 per cent of the labour force in Italy is employed in agriculture which were 33 per cent in 1960s. The decline in agricultural occupation is likely to continue. Compared to other sectors, Italian agriculture is particularly an underdeveloped economic sector because of organisational weakness and production imbalances. As a result, Italy has a huge deficit in food and agricultural products including the dairy items. On the other hand, rice is one of Italy's specialised crops and is exported in huge quantities along with olives, grapes and other citrus fruits.

It seems to me that Italy has potentiality to produce agricultural crops including rice. What is needed is strengthening of its organisational set-up plus introduction of an effective agricultural extension system to organise farmers and to establish balance in production. Incidentally the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations is stationed in the Italian capital, Rome. It is

strongly felt that the FAO should undertake special project for bringing about improvement and development in Italian agriculture. In fact, FAO and other related international agencies should put emphasis on providing both technical and financial support to those countries which have fertile land and favourable climatic condition for growing foodgrains and other agricultural crops in large quantities so that the surplus production could be utilized for feeding people living in countries where natural calamities and other socio-economic factors have made it difficult to make successful agriculture.

M Zahidul Haque BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Dhaka 1207

The CC elections

Sir, The civic problems, hardships and difficulties of the city dwellers of Dhaka City Corporation, Chittagong City Corporation, Rajshahi City Corporation and Khulna City Corporation are mounting unabated due to negligence in duties, carelessness inefficiency and alleged corruption of some officials of DCC, CCC, RCC and KCC for a long time.

The election of Mayors of the four city corporations is likely to be held next year. We feel that the services and performances of the present mayors of city corporations have always been far from satisfactory. They are

more interested in party politics than rendering useful services to the city dwellers.

We are of the opinion and we strongly suggest that the election to the office of Mayor of City Corporation may be held on non-political party basis so that non-political, noble, honest and sincere persons may take part in the forthcoming city corporations election and the non-political candidates if elected may serve the city dwellers better without any political affiliation, fear, favour or ill-will against anybody.

O. H. Kabir 6, Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203

Three months gone: No HSC classes

Sir, It is really a pity that the classes of HSC course for the sessions 1998 through 2000 have not yet begun in most of the colleges, although the session begins from July '98. The students have, however, been excited last 3 months' fees and they have already been given notice to pay for the current month. But they have not seen the light of classes, although the teachers have had their salaries.

There may be further disruption of classes due to hartals and unforeseen incidents which cannot be ruled out in Bangladesh perspective. Ultimately the students will lag behind in their studies and will

appear at the final examination without completion of their courses. How long will this continue in our education sector? Government's first and foremost duty should be to set things right on priority basis — at least in the education sector.

A Parent Dhaka

Unproductive investment

Sir, We should take lessons from the recession of some of the South East Asian countries which have been experiencing the severest economic crisis in this part of the world. Most of the banks in Indonesia and Malaysia had invested a huge amount of money for the construction of high rise buildings for residential purposes.

Unfortunately these apartment buildings do not fetch adequate returns against, for an unproductive investment in the house-building sector. Naturally the present position of these two countries have some effects on the minds of our builders and developers because of their failure to pay back the loans taken against the real estate business at a high rate of interest from the different banks of our country. At the beginning of the 21st century this type of business will not be good for Bangladesh. Abul Ashraf Noor House # 9, Road #4, Sector #5 Dhaka-1230