

## No More Hartal, Please!

The nightmarishness of hartal is fast degenerating into the spectre of a hydra-headed monster rising across the length and breadth of our national life. The thin fabric separating law from lawlessness and order from disorder is under a serious threat of rupture. Hartals have become more prone to violence, more destructive in their sweep because of the fact that they are now demonstrably more contentious than ever before: the caller party and the ruling party being engaged in a slanging match, as it were to get on with their respective programmes of staging hartal and countering it full blast. In a patently confrontational situation like this, violence has been erupting in newer, uglier forms as was clearly evidenced on the very first day of the 66-hr hartal.

Snipe and cracker shots were fired, with so much as a bomb thrown from a rooftop in wanton disregard for human lives. The casualties from manufacturing bombs stood at two, one in Dhaka and another in Barisal. Gunshots were heard in close proximity to police posse. More violence followed on the second day as violence only begets violence. It is difficult to keep count of people injured in the two successive hartals called by the opposition.

A single death caused by hartal is uncondonable, but there have been quite a few already as a blot on the conscience of those who called it. How long the nation should bleed from lethal politics? This destructive hartal culture must stop, here and now. What has the BNP gained by calling hartal that it could not have achieved without recourse to it? In our view, nothing. On the contrary, we think the party's image has suffered a good deal. To the BNP we say, you have had your revenge by calling hartal now it is time you stopped pressing further with it.

The important D-8 summit is only a few days away. We would like this auspicious event to be entirely free of any hartal call. Please do not insult the nation in front of world dignitaries, that is our fervent appeal to you!

If you believe in democracy, let the people judge for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Why must you force your party's opinion on the people? We urge the BNP to step back from further hartals and the AL to engage the opposition in a dialogue.

## Clinics or Death-traps?

Death traps in the form of unauthorised private medical clinics are growing in numbers throughout the country. This is a grave situation. A Daily Star investigation has exposed the soft belly of the administration responsible for issuing licences to clinics and detection of unauthorised ones springing up in any part of the country. The report basically brings into focus the pitiable lack of cooperation and coordination between the Health Directorate and the law enforcing agencies in identifying and eradicating the so-called health clinics engaged in illegal business that put public health in peril. There is hardly any mechanism by which these death chambers can be detected and their owners brought to book. The number of registered clinics in Dhaka is only 205 while 546 are said to be in business all over the country. Most of these clinics are housed in private buildings, many of them in unhygienic conditions and without proper equipment and qualified doctors in attendance. Several of these are engaged in the illegal business of terminating pregnancies, treating bullet or gunshot wounds behind the back of the police and many other anti-social activities.

The Health Directorate has a very simple answer to this vexing problem of registration. "Since we do not have any list of unregistered clinics we are not aware of any existence of unregistered private clinics in the country." They hold the police responsible for not shutting down the "illegal business being carried out by private clinics". The police for their part shifted the responsibility of "identifying" such clinics to the Health Directorate. In this tussle it is the health of innocent public which is suffering. The Secretary of Bangladesh Private Clinic Owners Association (BPCOA), whose business is hurt because of the mushroom clinics, had meetings with Health Ministry officials to stop this clandestine business but accuses the ministry of not responding to their proposal for a tri-partite committee to curb this menace.

Shouldn't the Health Directorate ask for a municipal licence at the time of registration of clinics and by doing so both the DCC and Health Directorate can maintain a list of authorised clinics and request for police action against the offenders in the interest of public health which is of vital importance for any nation.

## Insult to Civility

The ordeal of Farida, an eleven-year-old maid at a residence in the city's Siddheswari area who was tortured by her employer and later rescued by police in critical condition on Tuesday, is identical to those of many other child domestics in our country. The only difference is that her story has become a matter of public knowledge. Farida and Abdi, the eight-year-old maid who was mercilessly beaten and thrown out of her employer's house in the dead hours of night a couple of months back, are familiar faces in our civil society. In exchange for an apology of two meals a day, a place to sleep and some new clothes a couple of times a year, they are forced into the life of a slave. From dawn to well into dead hours of night they toil, washing clothes, sweeping floors, so on and so forth. Verbal and physical abuse interspersing.

The employers, who often boast of being conscious and conscientious citizens of the society, assume the role of remorseless tormentors, treating child domestics as piece of dirt. They simply forget the fact that just by hiring the poor children they are violating their rights, let alone hurling verbal and physical abuse at them. They don't even ask themselves for once whether they have the right to treat them as slaves.

Sensitisation campaign in the shape of posters, programmes on the electronic media has apparently failed to arrest the alarming rise of this menacing form of child right violation. Time has come for the law-enforcers to play their role. They must make sure that the abusers who get caught are punished. Otherwise, children like Farida will always be vulnerable to their tyrannical employers.

## Kazi Aref's Killing

## A Pointer to Law and Order Situation

*One thing is certain that, irrespective of widespread and intensified repression, people's will cannot be suppressed for long and will ultimately triumph. More we recall and act upon it, the better it is for all of us.*

not demonstrate a deterioration in the law and order situation in the country. People were stunned.

It may be recalled that to establish law and order was the first and foremost priority of the ruling party, as it was stated time and again, by their leader immediately before and after the last parliamentary election. The policy was highlighted on their election manifesto. But, as time passed, the incidence of crime grew, while very little of the pledge was translated into action. It has, unfortunately, been compounded by actions and encouragement of those who are endowed with the patronage of wealth and power of the ruling party. In the process, supporters of the opposing camp started to regroup in order to flex their muscles to match. This process continues.

There are many instances of commission of serious crimes which the government has not been able to solve or are not willing to solve. To cap it all, some of the crimes were reported to have been committed with the knowledge or hope that these would be condoned by members of the ruling party. How could one reprove veracity in the story of Tuhin, a BNP activist, who "committed suicide" by hanging himself with his shoe-lace in police custody within hours of being detained? Cynics remark that the shoe-laces must have been extraordinarily long and thick to do this marvel and Tuhin also must have waited long to take his life in a congenial place like a solitary police confinement.

No suitable action was reported to have been taken to solve this case.

Rubel, a promising university student, who was picked up by the police on a trumped up allegation, had to pay with his life while in police "care". The police officer allegedly involved in his murder is roaming around scot-free. Another university student lost his life in police firing but, according to police, he died in explosion while preparing bombs. The autopsy report proved otherwise; he died of bullet wounds in

lence erupted and bloodshed took place, with consequent loss of life and property. In contrast, BNP had made sure during their regime that no anti-hartal rallies were allowed, thereby avoiding conflict and violence.

The police normally took action against opposition workers and turned a blind eye to the real perpetrators of the crime. Cases in thousands have been registered, including most of the opposition legislators, many of whom were on false grounds. So is the case with



### Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

flighted on his back.

The anti-hartal rallies, a new culture of the present Awami regime, was stated to have been introduced to reassure and allow the anti-hartal elements among entrepreneurs, businessmen and others to go on with their normal trade and activities and also to occupy streets during the period of hartal. The opposition alleged that the exercise was principally aimed at making a show of force and, through intimidation and conflict with protection and support of members of the law enforcing agencies, to throttle hartal promotional activities of the opposition. As a result of confrontation, vio-

lence, thousands of political detainees. Often, the police take the plea that they had to comply with the unwritten orders of the superiors. Otherwise, how could one justify silence and inaction of a contingent of police witnessing some gunmen disembarking from the convoy led by a parliamentarian, chasing a peacefully picketing college student, and murdering him with a point blank shot? How come the police failed to apprehend the person who had snatched a gun from a policeman in bid to attack a BNP procession? Many newspapers published clear photos of the face and impending action of the snatcher. How come a senior

## Clinton's Acquittal and its Ramifications

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

*The fall-out from this impeachment trial is yet to be assessed. There is a view that a lady Republican (Elizabeth Dole) could be elected in the White House in 2000 while the Democrats could be back to control the House of Representatives.*

the impeachment trial, only

second in US history. Where did the Republicans go wrong? The simple answer seems to be that they became arrogant after they swept to control the House of Representatives in 1994 and they could not read the minds of the public. The trial was supposed to be about right and wrong; about whether President Clinton was guilty of perjury. On the second charge it was barely 50 votes. The Republican Congress members were severely disappointed with the result and at the end of the vote they quickly left Washington for their constituencies. The Monica affair began with a roar and ended in a whimper.

After the acquittal, President Clinton read a low-key statement at the rose garden of the White House. He was not accompanied by the first lady Hillary Clinton. Some believe that President wanted to demonstrate to the people that he was alone responsible for what he did and said on his affair with Monica Lewinsky. He apologised to the nation for the political mess he had created during the last 18 months leading to

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