

Our Bag of Faults

Government's mind on the donor community's overture for an early resolution of political conflicts raging in the country can be read from what commerce and industries minister Tofail Ahmed told The Daily Star on Thursday.

In principle, no sovereign and independent country worth the salt likes to be told about what she ought to do in resolving her own political crisis. If it should come to that, then the sensibilities of a nation would be badly hurt.

If the ruling party and the opposition had behaved responsibly by playing their respective roles through a steadfast adherence to institutional laws and rules there would be need for others to be exhortative with us.

We are sorry and ashamed that the donors had to do it; but we do believe their move was not meant to denigrate our country, rather it was out of a genuine concern for Bangladesh's development and welfare.

Auspicious Trial Run

Trial run of the trans-border bus service between Dhaka and Calcutta has gone smoothly and so have the talks between two sides on the nitty-gritty of the proposed commercial operations.

The process was indeed long-drawn, with both sides sweating over certain niggling details despite their basic agreement early in the day over launching the bus service.

Security for Girls

Two news items in a Bangla daily on Saturday certainly sent dreadful signals. A contingent from the Motijheel police station rescued a 15-year-old girl, hailing from Kushtia district, from forced prostitution.

In the second story, a crowd in Narayanganj handed Babul and his cronies, to the local police after battering them on suspicion that Babul had taken his fiancée to Narayanganj to sell her off at the Tanbazar brothel.

These, however, are not fleeting incidents. Allegations of racketeering in sex trade have become commonplace. The villains exploit the destitution of poor women and girls to lure them away from home.

WHEN an Islamic Revolution in 1979 catapulted Iran's clergy to power, the predictions about its future were grim indeed. According to the prognoses — then made — the country would inexorably plunge into medieval darkness and an anarchy of unprecedented dimension.

True to the speculations, the radical regime run by the clerics did encounter a series of cataclysms of bewildering variety. From the outset, the West was not reconciled to the emergence of an Iran which would be the arbiter of its own destiny and from the Day One it contrived to destabilise the post-revolutionary regime in Tehran.

The Iranian revolution — one of the most significant events of the century — had been unique in many ways. The World had lived with many deeply conservative Islamic states in the past. It has also seen many nationalist and avowedly secular nations in the Islamic world.

The Iranian revolution could consolidate itself at home. Baghdad launched a treacherous war against Tehran in 1990.

its first radical Islamic republic and provided a new inspiration to political Islam all over the world. It brought her enemies on all front, and few friends. But the most significant of the enemies it created was the United States whom the revolution's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini called 'the great Satan'.

The worse response was to come from the fellow Muslim countries of West Asia. Frightened by Iran's fervour to export revolution the existing political order — whether secular or conservative Islamic — in West Asia, started to perceive a new threat in revolutionary Iran.

solidate itself at home. Baghdad launched a treacherous war against Tehran in 1990. The western nations in their blind abhorrence of Iran's Islamic revolution now found great virtues in the socialist dictatorship of Iraq which they had stunned for long.

war launched by Iraq who however could not defeat Iran in almost nine years but was able to inflict heavy damage — nearly one million casualty — and sap the national strength of the revolutionary state. During the war Iran found herself virtually isolated and was economically shattered.

The Shifting Sands of Iran's Revolutionary Politics

Khomeini's dream of 'exporting the revolution' has today given way to a 'dialogue of civilisations' without the revolution suffering the loss of any of its basic tenets. The detractors of Iranian revolution may find consolation in the current debate over Iran's liberalisation but the Iranians are matured enough to draw the perimeter within which to limit such liberty.



PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

means a mean achievement even in historical reckoning. After two decades of its obstinate adherence to a militant Islamic ideology and tight control over the polity, the clerical regime in Tehran now is visibly moving closer to people's democracy alongside Islamic rule that it proclaimed on the eve of the revolution.

However, Iran's most remarkable foreign policy gains are in the region. Her ties with Saudi Arabia and most of the Gulf countries have dramatically improved. Iran is no longer isolated either in the region or in the world.

mellowed down while an all encompassing harshness of the past years narrowed down now only to a deep animosity towards Israel and half hearted hostility toward America. Iran has also softened on the only remaining issue of dispute with the West: its death sentence on the British author Salman Rushdie. President Khatami has officially signalled that the fatwa on Rushdie's life is non-actionable.

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A Profile of Sectarianism

Syed Talat Hussain writes from Islamabad

Mr Sharif's vilification speeches against those who disagreed with the Shariah Bill are a case in point. These have thickened the air of religious intolerance which disallows dissent and does not permit co-existence of different and differing religious beliefs. Sectarianism thrives in this situation.

THE Pakistan government is bracing itself against the coming crucible of an ageing sectarian tensions in the month of Moharram and preventing them from exploding into bloody sectarian killings.

event reaction, is thinking in time. It shows that the government is adding more meat to the exceptional measures taken every year in Moharram and is using both mediation and law enforcement and administrative measures as means to defuse the sectarian tension bomb which has already begun to tick.

luck to bear the desired result. The idea of forming a committee of Ulama is a tried one and in the past too this has been used to bring the Shia and the Sunni organisations to an agreement to stop their tit-for-tat, hit and run killings and to give peace a chance.

going on the rampage. This government has a special fascination for harsh punishments and every time the prime minister speaks to public as part of his mercy trips to places where some crime or the other has taken, he wants to "uproot crime", "see the criminals hung from the highest gall", and other such hard stuff.

forming the Ulama committee nor by strengthening laws dealing with sectarian terrorism, is that of weapons in the hands of sectarian militants. One or two criminals can play havoc with all efforts to establish sectarian peace and unleash a chain reaction which is beyond the control of the government or any committee.

To the Editor

PM's visit to DU campus

Sir, The recent visits of the Prime Minister to the Dhaka University on March 7 and March 16 to unveil a sculpture entitled "Swadhinata Sangram" and to institute the "Bangabandhu Chair" in the History Department of Dhaka University respectively led to suspension of all classes by a university notification from 10 till 12 noon on these days.

Since the PM's visit also lead to protests by the opposition student activists, the general student populace, apprehending trouble and breakdown of law and order abstain from coming to the university to attend classes. In other words, the PM's visit to the campus leads to stoppage of all academic activities of the university as well as partial disruption of administrative activities of the institute.

Now, what is the cost of such high profile visits? At least ten students, including six female students, were injured on March 7, 1999. On March 16, newspaper reports say that at least six buses of the university were allegedly damaged at various points in the city, and at least four persons, including a female student, were injured.

From another angle, her visits are also perhaps not in the happiest of moments. The DUCSU and hall union elections are reported to be in the wings. In a constituency where students are politically so conscious of their rights, interpretations put to her visits, especially leading to further session jams which is already sapping the morale of the students.

Dr A Z Mia, Dhaka

In favour of Kosovars

Sir, The people of Kosovo have been subjected to the Serbian killings and brutalities. The Serbians are committing the worst crimes against the human rights. The atrocities they are perpetrating to the whole humanity. Earlier, they had done the same things to the Bosnian people. Now they have targeted the Kosovars.

The Serbians are killing the Kosovars indiscriminately and driving them away from their own land. In such a critical juncture, our demands to the NATO and the international community are simple and clear:

1. Recognize the independence and self-determination of the Kosovars.

2. The international community should send ground troops and arm the Kosovars to defend themselves.

3. The NATO forces should sustain air strikes until the Serbs forces are totally withdrawn. 4. Arrest and try Milosevic, and all other war criminals.

Mahmudul Hasan Dhaka

Creating new crisis in Iraq

Sir, The US continues to find ways to create new crisis and deaths in Iraq. On 24th February 1999, it again started a new phase of air attacks on the so-called 'no-fly zones' there. The US war planes bombed both military and civilian targets. The main victims of this target are the most everyday action are the common people of Iraq, whereas the 'no-fly zones' are quite illegal according to the norms of international law.

Besides, the US practises double standard policies. According to Washington, the Kurds who are fighting for their national rights in Turkey are treated as terrorists. On the other hand the US encourages the Kurds of Iraq to fight against the legitimate government of Baghdad.

How long the US will continue to act like this?

Saidur Rahman, 32, Aulad Hassan Market, Tejgaon, Dhaka

Violence creeping up the ladder!

Sir, Violence and killing internally within the political parties has started in the present state of our society which believes in lawlessness and violence during the planning stage. Leading in this nefarious game of life and death is the abatement by the political leaders, with side effects contaminating the other sectors. From the fringe area, forcing an inside issue using violence is creeping up the hierarchical ladder; which means that the top leaders will not be safe soon enough.

That is, the godfathers themselves will be the future victims, once their orders are questioned or not obeyed. That is the law of nature, as violence carries the virus for self-destruction; because those in the right path are always in a minority.

It is a fallacious presumption that the two major political parties can control each other or one can topple the other. Look at the secret enemies within. Perhaps it is too late. The forbidden fruit has been tasted, and expulsion from the garden of Eden is due. The developments reported in the press already point to one specific direction: the disintegration has already started.

We are in for some bloody situations, like it or not.

Abul M Ahmad, Dhaka

Commentary is not anybody's job

Sir, I have been watching the Meril Tri-nation cricket tournament on BTV and listening to the commentary of Bangladeshi commentators. Our performance was as much bad, off the field (that is in the commentary box), as it was in the field. Our experienced and all-rounder commentators who are blessed with the rare gift of doing commentary in football, cricket, hockey, and who knows what else are testing the viewers' patience by putting their best efforts. They struggle in choosing words, and in their over-zealous endeavour to make their sentences bombastic they invariably produce an artificial tone much to irritation of the viewers.

Shamim Ahsan, 64/M, R K Mission Road, Gopbagh, Dhaka-1203

OPINION

Unemployment — Root of All Evils

Fahim Ahmed

It is really difficult to believe that our society as a whole has given serious thought to what the moment is causing awful decadence in the youth of Bangladesh. Leaving aside the girls and women who have taken the wrong and fatal route to self-destruction for survival (and this is not a social problem to be looked at lightly, in fact, it is yet more serious from all aspects of social life, national health and future of the society), hundreds of thousands of our young boys have either voluntarily joined or have been compelled to join different political parties just to earn a living or ensure survival. Many of them take the party shelter to protect themselves from legal and social action against them while earning enormous amounts through toll collecting, hijacking and extortion. No party has disowned even the most corrupt ones only to protect their own image thus supporting all these crimes virtually directly. The gangsters and extortionists have thus found it profitable to belong to a powerful party. What a travesty!

Although there is no denying the fact that political patronage has encouraged crime, there is no doubt that the incidence of crimes and political shelter against punishment, at least a large part of it, would not have been there had there been enough work for our young men and women. I am sure there has not been any serious estimate of the magnitude of unemployment in Bangladesh during the recent years except for the crude estimate of around 20 per cent as reported in the Economic Survey published by the Ministry of Finance. As anybody can guess there are thousands, in fact, lakhs of young men and women with graduate and post-graduate qualifications remaining unemployed in the country. Unemployment of the educated with SSC and HSC kind of qualifications or less is still frightfully large. This comes to the fore when graduates or post-graduates are in-

cluded to apply for a job either in the public or the private sector. Even when those with two first divisions/classes and no third division are asked to apply for a job in a bank or corporation, around a lakh seem to apply. Candidates for the annual BCS exams also number around a lakh and everybody knows how many are taken in. Let me give an example of the last (18th) BCS exam, for which about a lakh candidates originally applied and only 1753 were finally taken in of this again only 353 were appointed from among general graduates of around 90,000. That a rare chance or luck or I don't know what it

should be called! Think about the thousands that are passing out from different colleges and universities every year only to add to the existing rate of unemployment. We know the government cannot absorb all the unemployed people but there is little opening in the private sector also as the economy itself is not growing as expected. The industrial sector, public sector enterprises as well as private sector organisations are not absorbing even one per cent of the unemployed educated people, let alone the uneducated ones. God knows whose business it is to find employment for them!

There is at least one causative factor that is seriously true about the present law and order situation, in the country — widespread unemployment among young people many of whom would not have bothered for party affiliation, toll collection and hijacking had these — been any work for them. In fact, when there is nothing to do and yet survival demands income a good many young men and women have chosen the hopeless and wrong way — frustrating for themselves as well as the society.

Hamas in Palestine remain steadfast. Also steady is her opposition to West Asia Peace agreement.

At its 20th anniversary the Iranian revolution is however at a crossroads. A defining moment has arrived for the revolution which has now to decide whether it should continue to move — at home and abroad — on the ideological promises as envisaged by its charismatic leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini? Or should those promises be reworked or redefined in the light of the experience garnered during the last two decades? The clerical regime in Tehran is visibly divided into rival camps — one stubbornly stuck to the hard-line of the conservatives under the umbrella of the office of the Velayat-e-Faqih (Supreme guide) and another steering its course of reforms through the choppy waters of Iranian politics under president Khatami. But happily for the revolution, both the camps are equally loyal to the fundamental principles of the Islamic republic — and each claims to be the rightful heir to Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy. It is just that each offers its own interpretation of this heritage. While the conservatives are releasing the grounds held by them, Khatami's reformers tend to tread cautiously without provoking major confrontation with hardliners. And quite some distance has already been traversed under Khatami's presidency without a real show-down. After all, Khomeini's dream of 'exporting the revolution' has today given way to a 'dialogue of civilisations' without the revolution suffering the loss of any of its basic tenets. The detractors of Iranian revolution may find consolation in the current debate over Iran's liberalisation but the Iranians are matured enough to draw the perimeter within which to limit such liberty.

organised and armed themselves in the line of an efficient war-waging machine, the society, which is at the receiving end of sectarian tensions, is meek and passive, does not have the motivation nor has thought of the means to stand up and resist the misdeeds of a handful of people. This makes sectarian crime easier to commit because it takes place in a social environment which is least resisting and passively resigned to the fact of this crime. Then there is the domestic political context in which these sectarian organisations operate.

This government like previous governments has politicised religion. This has emboldened the religious zealots to take on each other more ruthlessly than ever before. They can justify their misguided religious crusades against those who do not subscribe to their religious point of view with reference to the need to create a pure Islamic society. Mr Sharif's vilification speeches against those who disagreed with the Shariah Bill are a case in point. These have thickened the air of religious intolerance which disallows dissent and does not permit co-existence of different and differing religious beliefs. Sectarianism thrives in this situation. Moharram is just an excuse for it to explode with full force.