

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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The Festival Begins

The last cricketing festival of the millennium begins with all its splendour at Lord's today. Twelve of the major cricketing nations of the world will vie for the ultimate glory in this limited form of the majestic game that officially started in 1971. Later this was to be revolutionized by Kerry Packer, commercialised by multinationals and popularised by Television. When test cricket was faced with an uncertain future for lack of interest, enthusiasm and sponsorship in a socio-economically ever-changing world where time management surfaced as one of the vital ingredients of survival, cricket too had to adapt itself to the needs of the time. And today, the limited edition of the game is as invigorating and exciting as ice hockey or soccer. The table has been finally laid for the feast with a menu that can hardly be surpassed in contemporary times and, that too, in the home of the game.

As a nation that has a long tradition with the game, may be without much success in international milieu, we are proud and delighted to be a participant and modest contender. We have set limited target for our achievement but we want to go about it in the best of traditions and spirit of this noble game. We must exhibit our grit and determination without being awed by the colossuses around us. Our boys must remember that they are in a planet where none from this country has ever before been. The best of wishes of a hundred and twenty million people are with you.

Strangely enough a third of the dozen contending teams are from South Asia, the most populated place on Earth that has adopted cricket as part of its life. It is no wonder that the fever runs very high in this region as the zero hour approaches. We are proud to have had three of the five world cup champion nations from South Asia in the past and hopefully producing a future one as well.

Since 1975 when the first Cricket World Cup was played in England, the tournament has produced a host of records and a series of exciting results. As more and more players and people get themselves deeply involved in the championship the game gains from strength to strength in popularity and competitiveness.

We hope the seventh edition of World Cup Cricket will be played in the best of traditions on the grounds of its ancestors and will set high standards in sportsmanship. There will be winners and there will be losers but we will always like to see the best team win.

The Daily Star wishes every team and each player best of luck and godspeed, and the readers, a lore of spectacular cricket.

Democracy and Our Agony

Our political leaders always inevitably failed us at every turn of a possible bright future. It happened in the 1980s and recurred in the current decade as well. I am quite sure that the prevailing democracy and our agonies will continue in the 21st century unless and until the people rise to take certain positive actions and bring about a minimum ethical standard in politics.

WINSTON Churchill once said of democracy that it is the worst system of government known to man, except for all the others. Unfortunately since 1971 and even before, we have known the worst of different forms of government, including democratic governments. We have seen the best of none. Including floods and cyclones, we have continued to witness the prolongation of the winter of despair.

The spring of hope sometimes appeared with the installation of a popularly elected government. It disappeared quickly with the emergence of democracy and our agony, entirely made in Bangladesh and possessing unique characteristics — strongly proclaiming its country of origin.

We have seen politics of all sorts. At the beginning, we had a democratic government. The famine of 1974 and brutal murder of Father of the Nation were stunning events which traumatized the whole Nation. Except for the opportunists and the nefarious characters fond of fishing in troubled waters, everybody else shunned politics. The autocratic government of the day desperately sought to come up with at least a democratic white-wash not because of popular demand but pressure from western donors who insist on democracy and a liberal market economy which incidentally, always seem to move together.

At a terrible cost to the Nation, a new political party was formed largely consisting of the collaborators of the past. The leading freedom fighter was at the helm of affairs. Perhaps he could not resist shaking hands with collaborators since continuing in power was of paramount importance. The assassination of Bangabandhu had shaken the politics and the people so much that there was no energy left to resist the new political development. Awami League lay practically etherised on a table, while the new political party went on scoring a century against the weak opponent.

The reader, I hope, will bear with me as I recount the past so that the present democracy and agony of the Nation can be better understood. The leading opposition party of today, thus born, remained in power till middle of 1981 until the second assassination of the Head of Government as well as the State brought it at par with the party, already lying etherised on a table.

The dictator had the best of

times. He had all the powers. Everybody was at his beck and call. He could have build up the nation as was done by President Park of Republic of Korea or Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore. But it seemed that Bangladesh could not enjoy a period of political good luck.

We really belong to an unfortunate group of Nations. Our political leaders will inevitably fail us at every turn of a possible bright future. The 1980s were a decade of one single dictator who just blew it through incompetence and corruption.

In the meantime, the two leading political parties of the country, brutalized through assassination slowly arose from their deep slumber. Awami League and BNP, respectively under the leadership of the daughter of the first assassinated President and the wife of the second assassinated President came back to life.

The nation was lucky that they did not wither away since Awami League had the solid or-



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

ganization down to the village level developed during the 1960s which withstood the onslaught from Pakistan Army and was strong enough to remain practically intact enough to revive the spirit of the War of Liberation. BNP, on the other hand, was the party of the rising business class of the nation and they remained solidly behind it.

The new democratic politics of the 1990s found the nation in a uniquely favourable situation. The stable two-party system has emerged and it seemed that until the foreseeable future, either BNP or AL would always form the government. In a poor country like Bangladesh, I for

one thought that it would be difficult if not impossible for one of the two parties to remain in power for more than one term since expectations of the people are too high to be fulfilled.

However, it does not matter. Each time, the party returning to power would be distilled out of its impurities and may tend to perform better than the last time.

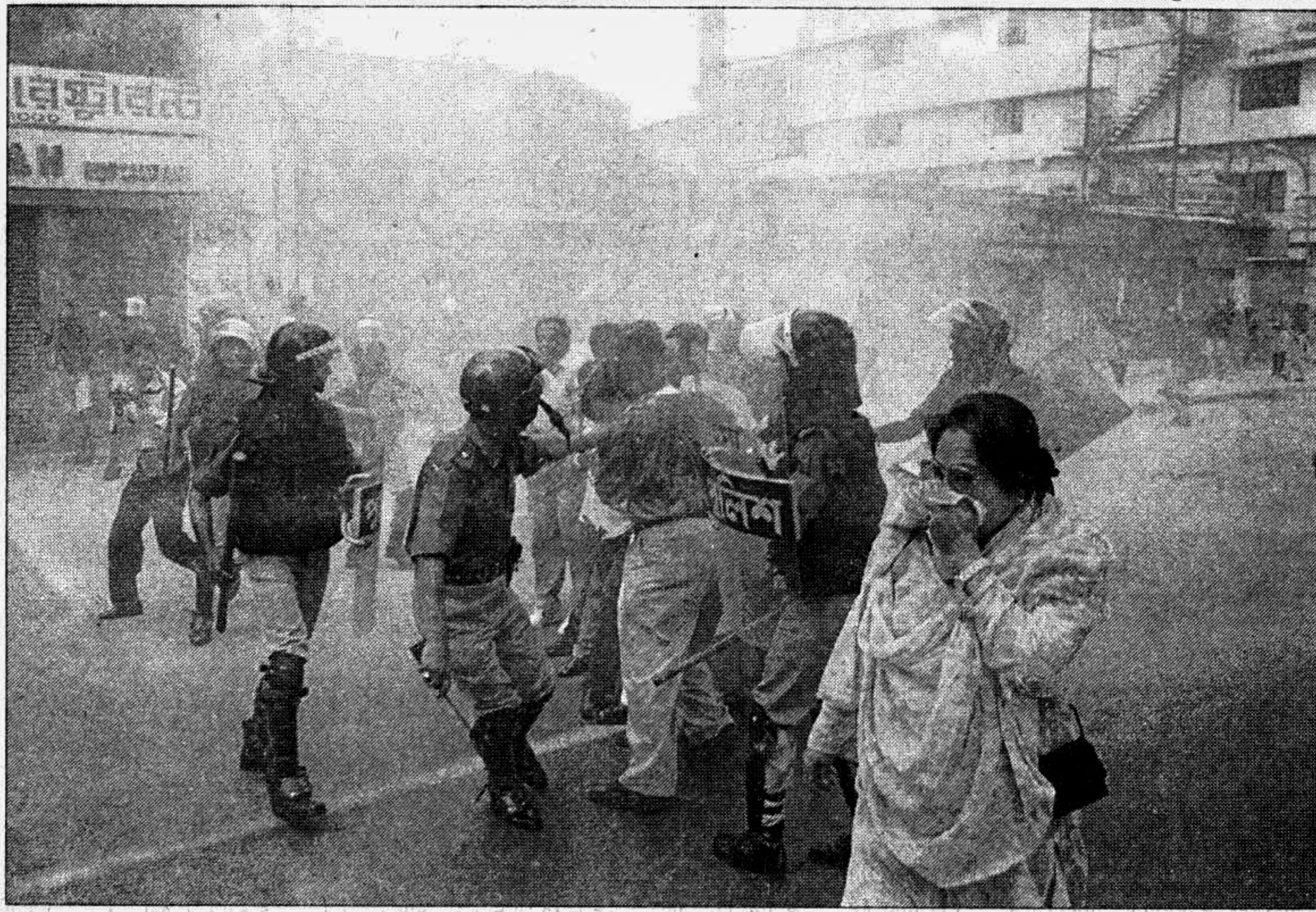
Consequently, with the change in government, quality of governance would keep on improving during each successive five-year period.

I have mentioned before that our political leaders always inevitably failed us at ev-

ery turn of a possible bright future. It happened in the 1980s and recurred in the current decade as well. I am quite sure that the prevailing democracy and our agonies will continue in the 21st century unless and until the people rise to take certain positive actions and bring about a minimum ethical standard in politics. First, let us try to work out the basic political scenario as it exists today.

Last week, I was traveling to Mymensingh. On the way, I got stuck in a traffic jam. I got off the car and went ahead and found to my utter astonishment that a truck and a bus had completely blocked the road and the two drivers were engaged in a fist fight — oblivious of the consequences as the passengers of the bus stared helplessly in silence. They were all stranded and powerless to do anything about it. Our present day political situation is exactly like this.

The two large vehicles are



AFP PHOTO

Democracy ... Bangladesh-style

the two political parties and like the two drivers, the two top leaders of the parties are engaged in a bitter perpetual confrontation which has blocked the economic and social progress of the Nation. But the leaders do not care. They are determined to keep us poor and wretched.

Under the circumstances, should the people simply stare at the two leaders and do nothing. There were at least 40 passengers in the bus and they all kept quiet. Instead, some one from the bus should have taken the leadership and all the 40 persons together convinced the two drivers to resume driving as soon as possible and settle their dispute at a more appropriate place and time convenient to both of them. It was hot summer afternoon.

Temper was likely to fly very soon. Unless someone took the initiative, the passengers might take the law in their own hands, burn down the truck and the driver as well. The bus driver would have run away in panic. The passengers in utter frustration would start burning the bus as well as some of the stranded vehicles (while others would take a U-turn and run away).

In a nutshell, it would have been hell let loose but for the intervention of a few from the bus who quickly settled the issue and everything became normal again.

It is very unfortunate that the two big leaders are blocking the progress of the nation. The two leaders must talk and not confront each other with threats and ultimatums. Government must enable the Opposition to ventilate its grievances in the Parliament, media and elsewhere. It would then be feasible to extract the promise from the Opposition to give up hartal politics. The leaders must realize that once people become desperate everywhere, they may take the law in their own hands. Once that happens, it would amount to hell let loose all over the country. Under such a situation, I am sure I would not be able to survive and leaders of the two leading parties would also meet the same fate.

Time has come for us to take the initiative and a citizen's grassroots organization should be established immediately. It would have no political ambition of its own but vigorously promote the interests of the citizens in general so that there is political peace and citizens do not suffer from the agonies of democracy.

OPINION

Is Bangladesh Becoming Police State?

Dr. A.H. Jaffar Ullah writes from New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

"Don't brood on what's past, but never forget it either."
— Thomas H Raddell

THE digital pictures flashed in the front page of Internet newspaper NFB these days are portraying a very dismal picture of Bangladesh. Needless to say, I'm not particularly thrilled about it. Police brutality and incursions in the main street are almost becoming a norm ever since Sheikh Hasina assumed the high office of the land.

Earlier in the year, we saw a picture of Awami League leader snatching a firearm from a police officer and pointing it towards opposition party's supporters. The May 12, 1999 issue of NFB flashed yet another disturbing image in the front page. This time the picture grabbed a woman by her saree and was about to undress her in broad daylight. The policemen are doing all these in the name of maintaining law and order in the street. I assume we are doing this through the full blessings of our Prime Minister.

Some of us have been engaged in writing campaign in various forums asking the main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), to refrain from staging hartal solely for political purposes. We wished the leader of the main opposition, Begum Khaleda Zia, had listened to our plea. Her party is turning a deaf ear to the clarion calls of the intellectuals of the nation and the results had been devastating. The Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wanted badly to crush the viable opposition in the nation, and she is taking all the opportunities her counterpart is offering through staging these unwarranted hartals.

Hardly a day goes by that we don't hear about any police brutalities. Why is this happening? I have a sneaky suspicion that perhaps the ruling party is letting loose the police force in the main streets. The main purpose here may be to intimidate people who are raising voices to protest the policies of the current administration. While doing so, the government party is transforming the civil society into a police-run state. This 'penny wise pound foolish' policy may backfire in the long run. Look as if PM Hasina had already subscribed to a scorched-earth policy to quell dissension among people who are critical of her policies. In democracy, one has to subscribe to the view that not everyone will agree to the policy of the

administration. The opposition political parties should comment on the policies of the government when it is deemed necessary. But our opposition party is equally guilty of being too eager to criticise everything the Prime Minister does to run the country. Sheikh Hasina did exactly that during 1991 through 1996 when Begum Zia was running the show. And now we just have had a role reversal. That is all!

The government resorting to police force to break the bones of opposition party members are nothing new in our impoverished land. As a youngster, we saw how the Chief Minister of Pakistan Muslim League wanted to crush the Language Movement in 1952 through the able hands of police. General Ayub Khan and his cohort, General Yahya Khan, also turned our land into a police state during the '60s. In the early days of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib also transformed our nascent republic into a police state through the help of police and the Rakkhi Bahini. The Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, may have selective amnesia, but the memory is still fresh in the minds of many of our fellow citizens. After the forcible removal of Sheikh Mujib the strongman, General Zia

also transformed the entire Bangladesh into a military state and his successor General Ershad closely followed example of his barrack mate. Those were the days of roughneck and indeed the military rulers ruled Bangladesh with virtual iron grip. When the democracy finally did arrive in Bangladesh in February 1991, we thought the days of police rule were over. But how wrong we were! Begum Khaleda Zia, the democratically elected PM did not amend any laws to abrogate the evil 'special power act' (SPA) in which every administration saw unlimited hidden power. As I write this opinion, the SPA is alive and doing well in Bangladesh. And the present Prime Minister is not in a hurry to do away with this evil anti-civil rights legislation. Is it a small wonder that Bangladesh is fast becoming a police state?

The PM and her lieutenants cannot isolate them from the mainstream citizens of the land thinking that they are un-touchable and are immune from police misrule. If the government bestows the police with unlimited power then they will surely make a new monster out of the police. I am afraid this may have happened already.

If the opposition now criticise what the Awami League did, then why should they repeat the same act? Are they proving any better? The most frustrating part is the opposition's statements after such hartals... "the people have shown their no-confidence on this government by observing hartal". Isn't it the height of hypocrisy? Who are the people? As far as I know, none of the working people refrain from going to their workplaces. If the shops are closed or the private cars are not seen on the roads, it is because they are protecting their properties from damage by either the pro-hartal or anti-hartal groups — certainly not because they support hartal.

There are so many issues which see the emergence of immediate and united attention of the whole nation, irrespective of the parties in position or opposition. It is high time that the government sit down with the opposition, invite the think-tanks and tackle issues like the deteriorating law and order, rising rate of corruption in all

ready. That is why the British Embassy has warned English women visiting Bangladesh not to pay a visit to police station. The British Embassy had correctly assumed that the English ladies will be safer in the hands of miscreants rather than in the grips of police.

The PM should think seriously over these issues for many good reasons. First, if common people are led to believe that Bangladesh has already become a police state, then they will retaliate with their ballots in the coming general election. In that case, her days are numbered. Second, the police corruption will skyrocket, if it has already not done so, if policemen realize that the PM will need their help to squash the opposition. Third, a society cannot thrive when police rule abounds in any nation.

Our people are not forgiving either. They will fuss and fret when the police rule will affect their livelihood. I think there is still enough time left for the PM to make amend to her policy of transforming the free Bangladesh society into a police run state. Her father trod the same water in 1974-75 with devastating results. Let history be her guide.

Very recently the Prime Minister requested the Opposition not to disturb democracy and political stability by creating artificial issues through terrorism. I don't believe that the Prime Minister is no naive as not to comprehend that there is no political stability in our country. And democracy? We have a long way to go for even regarding the concept of democracy.

Today the general public who have elected this government with such high hopes can only witness the tug of war between the two leaders and neither of them intend to move an inch towards the path of compromise. Little do they realize that the country is not their personal property. Otherwise the concealed fire of personal vengeance would not have been so prominent in the statements that they make in public.

Immediately after the Awami League government took over, the opposition started making comments about the 'failure of the government'.

Both the ruling party and the opposition are well aware of the huge financial loss caused by the hartals. Yet neither of them seem forward with any strategy for ending this political stalemate. The recent hartal was not called off by the opposition despite the business leaders' request to give 3-month moratorium on hartal. The opposition have repeatedly argued that the Awami League, while in opposition called more hartals. So, this a competition, no matter what the price is or what if the country's interest is

at stake.

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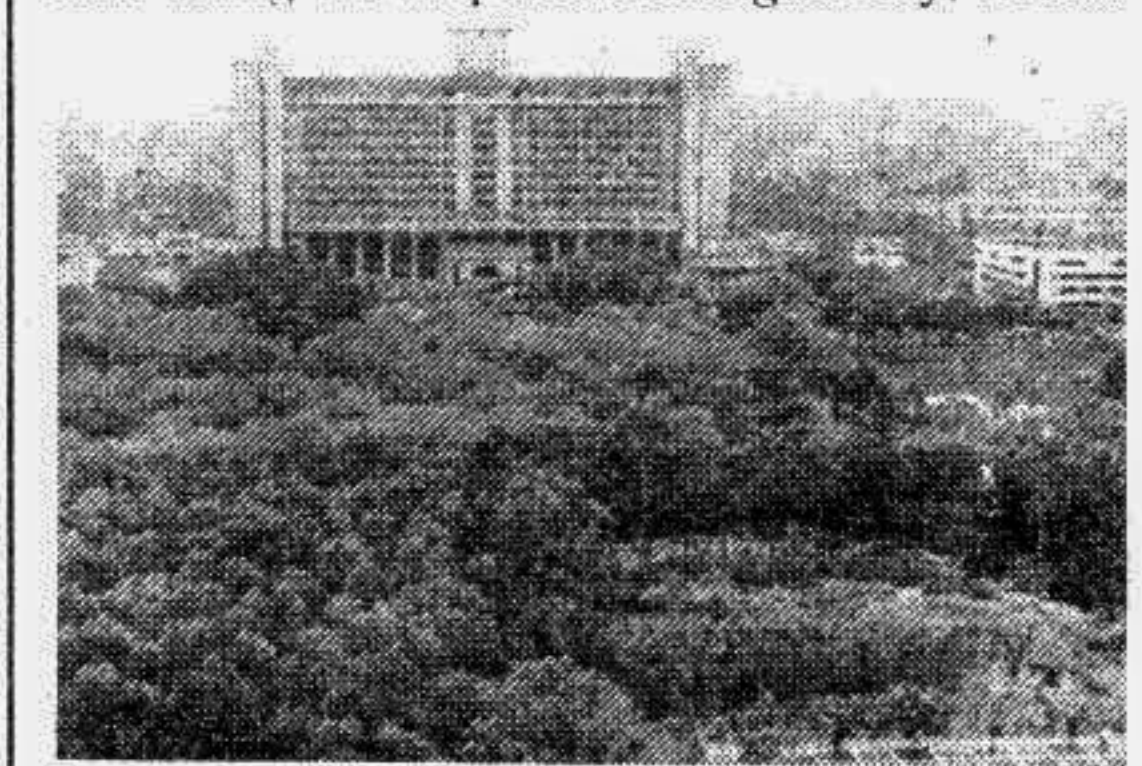
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Friday Mailbox

Save the Osmany Udyan

Sir, When the country is lacking many of the urgent needs like power, water, residential crisis, etc., the construction of the conference centre for the upcoming Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit to be held in Dhaka in 2001, is a luxury to us. The construction work will cost Takā 300 crore. Is it feasible for one of the poorest country like Bangladesh?

Osmany Park has been selected as a place for the proposed conference centre. And for this, the age-old park has to pay. When our political leaders often raise their voice to save environment and plant trees on various occasions citing the importance of greenery, in one



hand, they are creating situations to cut those trees on the other. What an irony!

We don't understand about what benefit would the government gain by constructing the centre by destroying the park. The area is already crowded by many unplanned multi-storied shopping complexes, the bus stand, the stand, cinema halls and govt.-semi govt. establishments etc. The proposed building in this area will only multiply the existing problems. Won't it make the life unbearable at Gulishtan?

Our prime minister is said to be a nature lover and serious about the environment. We do not expect her silence this time.

S M Enayetur Raheem
Applied Statistics
ISRT, DU

World Cup Cricket and the BCS

Sir, The World Cup Cricket of 1999 is very special for the people of our country especially for the youths. For the first time in the history of Bangladesh, our players have achieved the rare honor to show their performance in such a grand occasion. Unfortunately, the schedule of the coming BCS exam has been arranged during the pick-hours of the cricket match.

This will definitely deprive the examinees of BCS exam either to enjoy the matches or to attend the exams with their full attention. It may be mentioned here that such cricket match with the participation of Bangladesh in future may be uncertain. So, missing of this World Cup is really a great miss for the examinees. I draw the attention of the authorities of Public Service Commission (PSC) to the matter and I earnestly request them to consider the matter and re-arrange the schedule of the BCS written exam.

Nusrat
Khaligao, Dhaka

Nip proxy in the bud

Sir, After overcoming a plethora of violences, sexual harassment, extortion and other malpractices, Dhaka University is now going to step into the new millennium with a new-look. It is also mentionable that DU has at last par-

tially recovered its old prestige by becoming the best university of South Asia and the 37th in Asia-Oceania region. And, at least we can congratulate the DU authority because of the authentication of the admission test.

However, recently the admission test of the University is going on. What is actually happening around this time in the residential halls of the university?

Some university students of 2nd and 3rd year who are not eligible for giving admission test, are resorting to illegal means giving proxy and acting as helpers in the admission test. The outsiders and in some cases relatives of these students get it done by paying money. These helpers are preparing themselves for the test with an extensive study of 'Bengali, English, General Knowledge and other concerned subjects.'

I expect the authority concerned to take tangible steps to nip this malpractice in the bud.

A K Azad
BB Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall
DU

NATO and US hypocrisy

Sir, What is this slow-motion farce being enacted by NATO in Kosovo? Why Milosevic is not being treated at par with Saddam and showered with the same intensity of bombing as in Iraq? Why this discrimination and soft-heartedness, and millions of parleys and shuttle diplomacy?

It can all be explained easily enough. The Jewish and Christian lobbies in the USA control Clinton and his administration. The genocide of the Muslims in Europe is being ignored and the details are devoted to the precision of the light bombing. Suppose, American citizens in a foreign country were being treated in the same manner as the Muslims in Kosovo, then how US and NATO would have reacted?

Abul M Ahmad
Dhaka

Plenty of time!

Sir, What on earth four ministers were doing at the opening ceremony of a private hospital in the private sector? One minister is enough at one gathering; and most of the time it is not essential (give chance to others in the society).

Our society is very fond of rituals, and every year we waste hundreds of man-hours on anniversaries and opening ceremonies and relays of speech-making. Looks like the Bengalee gift of the gab will let us down — already proved in 28 years of field experience.

Our popular Prime Minister also appears to be rather fond of making frequent public appearances, in and out of season, when lesser personalities would do. The BTV chamchas show her face on the screen more than 90 per cent of the time delivering speeches to crowds who are not visible on the screen (with audio on — it is not necessary to watch the zoomed-in face of the speaker all the time).

We have to remould our speech culture (presuming we have such a proud 'culture'). One of our top intellectuals referred to a particular type of parasites in our society popularly known as dhandhabaz or opportunists (DS, May 3). Admit it or not, the popularity of our two public Begums is to a considerable extent due to the noises made by the chamchas or dhandhabaz humming around these two august leaders of the nation. Will some one please draft a Code of Practice for the public leaders?

A Zabr
Dhaka

"Wise Words in Political Wilderness"

by Neelima Islam

I thank Mr Mahfuz Anam for his commentary 'Wise Words in Political Wilderness?' in the 19 April edition of The Daily Star. Though these kind of attempts seem futile because the ones who are supposed to pay heed, do not really read. However, we as conscious citizens must not relent from speaking out our minds..... you never know, perseverance may pay us one day!

When we look around in despair for a worthy member of the government, the President is indeed a blazing comet. He is recognised for his honesty, simplicity and nationalism. We can recall the opinion poll conducted by the Centre for Sustainable Development in December last year according to which President Shahabuddin was voted as the most favourite personality of the Dhaka city dwellers. Such a personality should be an ideal to follow. The Prime Minister could prove her efficiency by listening to the President's advice from time to time or let him mediate for attaining the long awaited national consensus.

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Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.