

Well Done

THE opposition's car rally campaign against 'government's failures' passing smoothly through the Bangabandhu Bridge, the first day of the 'long march' to Panchagarh, passed off peacefully. We thank Begum Zia who led from the front and personally supervised the operations occasionally stepping back to ensure that everything was going right. She has lived up to her part of the deal struck with the government to address the latter's concern over the bridge's safety. This is the essence of responsible leadership demanding that party supporters obey the law, play by the rules of democratic behaviour.

But we would have been certainly happier if we were spared the embarrassment of having to report that no toll was paid for the few hundred cars that crossed the bridge on Sunday. However, the BNP made amends last afternoon, paying the dues in one go. The opposition surely deserves a pat on the back for showing the sensibility to clear the toll, thereby not letting the not-too-small a lapse spoil the goodwill they have earned by their peaceful march on the first day.

Sensible decision on the government's part to let the opposition passage through the bridge has certainly saved the country from another round of confrontational politics. A hartal would have certainly entailed in case of the ruling party's obstinacy. We are glad that sensibility dawned on both sides at the right moment. It is now a common knowledge that a day's hartal costs the country some 300 to 400 crore taka. Sensible politics is good not only for the people but also for the economy. We have always advocated for sensible politics and maturity in leadership. The long march episode suggests both the government and the opposition may have finally paid heed to our solicitation.

The campaign being an on-going process there is need for caution on both sides till the long march reaches its destination, the country's northernmost tip Panchagarh. Just as the opposition should not lower its guard for a moment so also is the government expected to carry on its sensible policy to let the former enjoy its right to dissent in the fullest measure. It is democracy that must come out a winner.

The gains of the government-BNP deal on the long march issue have put a sort of positive shine on our negative political culture. Let's use this window of opportunity for improving the badly soured government-opposition relationship so that we land on the doorway to constructive national politics.

Power Plight

POWER and plight seem to have become synonymous these days. If it isn't the generation system going kaput, then it is the distribution system. If it isn't collapse of a power tower, then it is the snapping up of a transmission line. If it isn't some weird accident, then it is lack of maintenance. The end result is more or less the same: disruption of power supply over a large area for hours together and woes for the residents.

The latest in the series of power disasters occurred when a tower of 132 KV Ashuganj-Kishoreganj transmission line collapsed and fell into the Brahmaputra near Bhairab in the early hours of Saturday. Five districts in the greater Mymensingh region immediately plunged into darkness. The people of Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Kishoreganj and Netrakona have been without electricity and, therefore, piped water. Any alternative arrangement to restore power supply looked highly unlikely before Monday evening.

In one of our recent editorials, we urged the power authorities to mind the maintenance business on the distribution network. Unfortunately, our plea seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Maintenance still remains the Achilles' tendon in the power sector. Delayed attention of the Power Development Board (PDB) is reported to have led to the collapse of the tower, thereby triggering off a big-scale crisis.

One wonders when the power people will come to their senses and live up to their responsibilities. They do not seem aware of the dreadful consequences the frequent power failures may lead to, both on economic and social fronts. The flare-up of Old Dhaka residents, frustrated and enraged following hours, and even days, without electricity and water, is not an incident of distant past. In view of public outcries the administration has already gone on alert deploying law-enforcement personnel at the power installations to ward off unpleasant incidents. We earnestly hope the power people place the disconcerting developments in proper perspective and act accordingly.

All-pervading Corruption

A list of corrupt Asian countries has been published by an international NGO, the World Economic Forum (WEF). The news published in The Daily Star Monday shows Singapore at the bottom of the list and Indonesia on top among eleven nations of Asia. Though Bangladesh did not feature in the main report, she was put on top of the list of thirteen nations by the NGO.

We do not wish to go for a comparative study but we know this to be true that corruption is endemic in our country. The supreme irony is, this abominable problem has never been addressed by any administration in this country and nobody wants to face it or talk about it. It has never been discussed threadbare in any public forum nor in the Parliament. As a result we are having to live with this social scourge which is getting bigger and bigger by the day. Corruption is rampant in almost all institutions of the country.

The best our leaders have done to eliminate this social evil is blame the previous regime. This is a favourite tune with the government in power to eliminate corruption. No tangible attempt has been made by any party while in power. But we all know and agree that this should be done. This huge problem calls for a massive campaign and we must all be prepared to talk about it freely and frankly to be sufficiently sensitised on the issue to launch the crusade.

Mistaken Target and Disastrous Outcome

The timing of the embassy blunder was atrocious; it occurred just as Russian envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin — with US support — was preparing for a trip to Belgrade to promote a plan that would end the Kosovo conflict. Now that peace plan — like the Chinese embassy — has been badly damaged; Chernomyrdin cancelled his trip.

THE NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, horrible as it was, was not just a military mistake and intelligence blunder, it was a diplomatic disaster that will take many weeks to repair. The bombing probably doomed any prospects for a prompt diplomatic solution to the war in Kosovo and may have changed the terms on which the conflict may be ultimately settled.

The embassy bombing sparked huge protests in China and the government demanded that the United States apologise, investigate the bombing and severely punish those responsible for it.

The first of the demands has been met. The second demand almost certainly will be, and the third ought to be — not so much because the Chinese called for punishment as because the bombing was so unnecessary and disastrous.

Embarrassed US officials said the US B-2 bomber hit the target it had aimed at. Trouble is, pilots were given defective information by the CIA and other US intelligence agencies, so the target was wrong. The basis of the error was an outdated map used by analysts. The map didn't include the new location of the Chinese embassy.

The attack on the embassy is just the latest in a series of apparent intelligence failures for which the CIA has been held responsible. A year ago, it was caught by surprise when India carried out underground nuclear tests. In early August, the US embassy in Kenya was destroyed by a bomb a few months after the US ambassador there

had sought major security improvements, and later that month the US bombed — probably mistakenly — a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan thought to be linked to Osama Bin Laden. During this bombing, it was announced that the plant was linked to the production of chemical weapons. Yet earlier this month the US unfroze the assets of the Saudi businessman who owned the plant.

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Chinese anger at the embassy bombing is understandable. The US should undertake steps to appease China and its legitimate demands. But there is also great danger in letting emotions get out of hand. To put this bombing in perspective, it needs to be emphasised that while NATO attacked an embassy, Yugoslav tanks and troops have methodically and routinely destroyed thousands of homes, farms and even cities in Kosovo, deliberately murdering people and making others homeless.

And, while the US has apologised for its blunder and will probably take other steps to

demonstrate its contrition, not a peep of remorse has emanated from the lips of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. The US committed a terrible mistake; Milosevic commits war crimes.

The mistaken attack has raised three sensitive issues for the NATO leaders. Will it end the diplomatic initiatives to end the conflict? Will it affect public opinion in the NATO countries for the military action? And will it affect how the air campaign will be conducted in the future?

The impact on public support for the air campaign is more difficult to gauge. The embassy bombing has created some erosion of support among the general public in the NATO countries. The publicised bombing errors, such as, the bombing of a passenger train, a refugee convoy, and civilian buildings have created some confusion despite the air campaign slowly

normally begins with air strikes in order to soften up an enemy's military apparatus. Then it is followed by ground operation. But Clinton's aversion to the use of combat ground troops has left the NATO military commanders with few tactical options except keeping bombing on Serb targets till Milosevic blinks.

The issue is more difficult to predict with certainty is how bad and how permanent the impact of the embassy bombing will be on the bilateral Sino-US ties. China expects the US to make significant concessions on sensitive military, trade and diplomatic issues to get the relationship back on track.

In addition to seeking full apology from the US and NATO countries, China is also demanding other conciliatory measures from the US, such as, abandoning the idea of including Taiwan in the proposed development of a US-backed defence umbrella in Asia; approving China's bid to join the WTO without demanding any substantial further opening of Chinese markets, and dismissing allegations that a Chinese spy passed US nuclear secrets to China.

The bombing triggered violent mass protests throughout China. Although these protests were, in some cases, encouraged by the authorities, they carry a deeper message. The conserva-

tive forces within China are using these protests to strike a blow against the policy of engagement with the US pursued by President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji.

Zhu's economic reforms and efforts to streamline government have left him unpopular in certain quarters within the government. His position has also been weakened by the US rebuff of his WTO offer. A further breakdown of relationship with the US would leave him isolated within the government.

Both sides need to take steps to diffuse the current situation. China needs to acknowledge US apology as well as the extent of Serbian atrocities in Kosovo. The US and other NATO countries, on the other hand, need to involve China in any longer term solution of the Kosovo problem.

It cannot be denied that the present strain in the Sino-US relationship has been exacerbated by the hardline US position on China's entry to the WTO. In recent weeks, China appeared to be near a deal with the US on its WTO membership — potentially the culmination of China's "open door" policy since the early 1980s. If the US wants a more open and cooperative China, it should continue to engage the current leaders who offer that prospect.

The best way to support the reformist approach of the current Chinese leadership would be to admit China to the WTO. In the absence of such a deal, there is very little the Chinese leaders can show to their people as the benefits from a policy of engagement with the US.

the people from external aggression and internal lawlessness.

Simultaneously with the improvement of service conditions of the magistrates, provision should be made for heavy punishment for them for corruption and dereliction of duties. Judicial tribunals at different levels should be constituted for enquiry and trial of the magistrates in case of allegation of corruption against them. Corruption should be punishable by imprisonment and fine and should automatically make them liable for dismissal. The judicial tribunal for enquiry and trial of magistrates and judges below the level of Additional District Magistrate and Additional District Judge should be headed by a Senior District Judge as Chairman. The judicial tribunal for enquiry and trial of officers of the level of Additional District Magistrate and Additional District Judge and above should be constituted with a Judge of the High Court and Supreme Court as its Chairman. Such cases should be completed within a period of three months under summary procedures.

The author is a former Cabinet Secretary and Ambassador.

How to Stop Lawlessness and Terrorism

Restructure and Upgrade Magistracy

by Mohammad Siddiquer Rahman

Upgrading of magistracy should make the position of magistrates more dignified, give them higher status, better remuneration and thereby attract people of higher quality, better ability and honesty.

THE magistracy and the judges must be scrupulously honest, conscientious and just and fair to deliver the goods. They must be above corruption and external influence and maintain neutrality in the trial of the cases. Unfortunately the present day magistracy and judiciary have also earned bad reputation about their honesty and integrity which has badly tarnished their image. As such the present generation of the magistracy cannot play an effective role in the maintenance of law and order by punishing the guilty and protecting the innocent.

In order to improve the quality of the magistracy and to instill in them a spirit of honesty, integrity and impartiality, it is essential to restructure the services of magistracy and upgrade their status and service conditions. With this objective in view magistracy should be divided into two streams, namely executive magistrates and judicial magistrates. Executive magistrates will remain attached to the district magistrates for performing executive functions as magistrates. They will continue to remain members of the BCS administrative

cadre and be under the control of the Establishment Ministry. The judicial magistrates on the other hand will constitute a new and independent cadre of service and will in due course enjoy the powers of a sessions judge. They will be separated from the executive branch of the government and placed under the administrative control of the Supreme Court. This would create an independent judiciary for the magistrates as is required under our constitution so that they may remain outside the orbit of political and executive pressure and influence. This would also enable the judicial magistrates to act neutrally and justly. They should be separately recruited on the result of a competitive examination from amongst master degree holders and must have a degree in law. They should be given a higher grade of pay and the pay of secretary to the government before their retirement. They may also be made eligible to be raised to the high court and Supreme Court like the civil judges.

The judicial magistrates should also be made responsible for inspection of the thanas under their jurisdiction to ensure that there is no delay in the investigation of the cases and in submission of charge sheets against the accused persons. He should also see that there is no unnecessary harassment of the accused during the period of trial. Trials should be completed within a prescribed time limit and action should be taken against persons concerned for causing unnecessary delay in the trial. The Assistant Commissioner of Police and the OC of the thana must remain present during the inspection of the magistrate according to the time-table given by him.

The magistrate should also hold local court for hearing BL cases under section 110 CrPC to bind down known and habitual criminals and terrorists who should be required to furnish bonds for good conduct. If necessary a new law may be passed to enable the government to vest summary powers to any other court of the magistrate or the sessions judge and require them to complete the trial of the cases within a prescribed time limit.

A question may arise as to whether there is any need to have a separate executive magistracy. Yes, executive magistrates would be required for functional necessity as magistrates are needed for undertaking many executive functions other than trial of cases. They also need magisterial experience for district administration and secretarial functions.

Upgrading of magistracy should make the position of magistrates more dignified, give them higher status, better remuneration and thereby attract people of higher quality, better ability and honesty.

These restructuring and upgrading are no doubt radical measures, but without such radical approach the present day terrorism and crime cannot be stopped. Merely tinkering at existing police and magistracy, transferring a few officers here and there or drawing departmental proceedings against some of them are not going to do much good. It is true that the proposed restructuring and upgrading will involve substantial additional cost. But such costs will be more than rewarded if these measures can banish lawlessness and armed violence from the country and give the people security and rule of law. After all, the first duty of the state is to provide security to

Will Yeltsin Emerge Stronger after Abortive Bid to Impeach Him?

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for punishing the authorities for their 'crimes'. Grigory Yavlinsky, whose liberal party has 46 votes, had shouted before the balloting but he too was almost crestfallen after the outcome. The charges against the president were serious and it was assumed that at least one or two of them will receive the necessary votes to begin the impeachment process. But the critics might have lost sight of the fact that the current NATO crisis had considerably improved Yeltsin's position at home.

The 68-year-old ailing president, who largely remained confined within hospitals and restricted office work of late, unexpectedly became too active since the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia began. Although no longer a superpower an active role in Moscow, president Yeltsin thought, in dealing with the NATO crisis would enhance his image as an active head of state internationally and pay handsome dividends at home in political crisis. He is largely right as many recalcitrant deputies in the Duma have sided with him after they saw the president work fulltime with fresh vigour during the NATO crisis. There is no denying that the NATO tangle has brought Russia to the centrestage of international politics and Yeltsin

is very much there regardless of the efficacy or rationale of Moscow's policy on the issue. The voting coinciding the NATO bombing helped the president ward off the impeachment attempt.

Many deputies saw a parallel between the impeachment of American president Bill Clinton and that of their own president. They saw the attempt as 'half-hearted' and also took into consideration the fact that the upper house is likely to be more soft to the president on the issue. Only 348 lawmakers in the Duma took part in the voting after Vladimir Zhirinovsky's ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party boycotted the session in support of the president. By firing prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, who enjoyed broad support in the Duma, the embattled president sent a strong signal that he could still overcome the problems that a largely hostile lower house of parliament is creating for him and this favoured him in the ultimate analysis.

The problems of president Yeltsin are many — both politically and economically. The NATO crisis helped him domestically and internationally as far as his authority and ability

to deal with a grave situation is perceived even though the imbroglio remains a big challenge for Moscow and it remains to be seen how eventually the crisis is resolved. It is possible that he will seek to be heard more seriously on this issue. Russia has traditional links with the Serbs and Moscow's response to the situation in Kosovo is certainly testing the wisdom of its leadership facing a strong NATO led by the United States. The oppo-

President Yeltsin appears to have emerged stronger at home for the time being but whether he can maintain it for long is a big question. For the temporary incidental success may not favour an ailing president somewhat forced to play a pivotal role currently in NATO and other affairs. His hands are full with economic and political problems while the eventual unfolding of the "Kosovo" issue will also influence his fate. But the failure of the impeachment attempt will definitely give him a reprieve.

However, let us first applaud the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student front of Awami League, for setting a unique example of political co-existence before the parent organisations did. The event took place on Wednesday 12 May at Sir Salimullah Medical College (SSMC) premises, marking the fresher's reception for the current session and the conference of SSMC unit of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student front of BNP. A group of BCL leaders of SSMC unit led by its president Akther Ahmed Shuvu presented a bouquet of Rajanigandha to BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia, who responded with a beaming face amidst cheers and applause from the audience. It was a rare event and worth praising indeed.

Then, just after three days, the parent organisations of the two student wings suc-

cessfully worked out a compromise between themselves. Now, we can surely see the silver lining! We must agree once again that nothing is impossible for a nation who had fought the War of Liberation with a single and unified spirit and till now has been fighting against the natural calamities one after the other, amidst other odds. For some reasons, we have lost that unified spirit of political co-existence, which is so essential for forging ahead in competition with the developing world. We must therefore, revere that spirit.

If the two biggest political parties of our country can come out of the shell of egotism and realize the fact that there is no loss of face when a decision is taken in the greater interest of the country, then certainly we have a reason for sowing high expectations in resolving other political differences. This sensible step in the political trend would enhance the public trust on our politicians. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Government for coming forward in reaching a compromise with the Opposition. We also appreciate the Opposition's stance in agreeing to the conditions laid by the Government taking into consideration the greater interest of the country. After all, the nearly-a-billion-dollar bridge (BJMB) is a public property and the responsibility of maintaining its security lies on all sane citizens.

To the Editor...

"Culture and the issue of disability"

Sir, We are glad to see the article titled "Culture and the issue of disability" in the DS on April 13, 1999. Nowadays disabled persons have started raising their self-initiative voices against all odds. Over the decade it has a great significance by observing separate national disabled day. Printing issues on covering disability every day, the situation will get worse if

we keep on cutting trees.

For the PM or the high officials of the government, it's very easy to give such instructions because they take joyride by A/C cars. Let them come to Motijheel by a scooter or rickshaw or bus, I am sure they will understand why we don't want it to make happen.

This is our country, our city — they must listen to us.

Rahnuma Hossain
Dhaka

NATO goes brute

Sir, Every Chinese national all over the world felt enraged by the brutality of NATO's attack on Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. NATO's so-called mistake is a kind of aggression to China's sovereignty and a kind of ignoring Chinese people's rights. Chinese nationals living in Bangladesh strongly condemn this kind of brutality.

Boris Wang
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