

## Keep It Up, Please

Is the Opposition losing anything without the hartal-dependent protests against the government? Far from being a loser they are actually emerging as a solid gainer from the change in their agitational policy that now eschews frequent hartal. In terms of presence in the public mind, visibility, eye contact, getting messages across and audience or spectator response, the three-day road march that Begum Zia staged in the greater Mymensingh region albeit proved a much better method of political agitation than impulsive hartal.

We recall that following arrests of BNP leaders and activists in connection with the death of a police constable in a bomb attack the air was rife with the speculation of a hartal on 22nd July. But no, the BNP opted out of it; and not entirely because the arrested persons, at least the high-profile among them, were given bail by the court but primarily because of a healthy recapitulation of an earlier phase of hartal-free agitation which had raised their standing with the people.

Seemingly inspired by the outcome of her 500-mile road march in a motorised cavalcade that saw her address as many as 26 public meetings in six districts, Begum Zia has now announced plans to stage anti-government demonstrations throughout the country on August 3. Processions and public rallies are scheduled for the day. Quite clearly, hartal has been excluded from her otherwise intensive programme for agitation. Moreover, she has adopted the 'vote for us' approach in place of what has hitherto been a call for toppling the government. This is the stuff democratic politics ought to be made up of. Rather than imposing hartal on people and bringing the economy and civic life to ruin, win their hearts and minds by persuading them to see your points of view. The opposition, especially the BNP, deserves a round of applause for treating the people as an electorate, respecting their mood and concentrating on issues that are of interest to them, all with an eye to the next election. Democracy is all about supremacy of the ballot and sovereignty of the people's will.

It is heartening to note that in apparent reciprocity of the sense of responsibility being displayed by the opposition in the conduct of their programmes, the ruling party's approach, by and large, has been far from obstructive. This a political culture we enthusiastically greet and wish to see prosper.

## Protector Turns Predator

In recent times, the police have hogged headlines, mostly for wrong reasons. Their activities have often gyrated around the extreme ends of recklessness and callousness; in the process, indirectly abetting in and at times directly perpetrating violation of law. On Monday night it was the criminal recklessness and callousness in police sergeant Saroj Kumar Roy's behaviour that led to the death of an innocent young rickshaw-puller, Masud. Pre-meditated it may not have been, the killing nevertheless raises a string of disquieting questions: Why did the on-duty personnel draw the service revolver in the first place? What made him switch off the safety catch? Did it happen accidentally or was it off all along? Besides, according to reports carried by different news dailies, his very intervention in the apparently innocuous encounter between the deceased and a rickshaw van-puller was uncalled for. Then, why did he? On the whole, the incident puts a very big question mark over the technical and psychological orientation of the police official in particular and, given the upward trend in police excesses, the department in general. Maybe, it's time the high-ups in the department and the home ministry started viewing things in the perspective of a pervasive sense of arrogance of power and authority among the law enforcers. Also, they should not rule out the possibility of technical inadequacy in them.

Deaths in custody, allegations of widespread corruption and nexus with arms and drugs cartel, recovery of decomposed corpse from the overhead watertank at the Detective Branch office, public humiliation of opposition legislators, and a female activist, sexual harassment of women, etc. are indications of systemic failure in the police department. While condemning the reckless behaviour and demanding exemplary punishment for it, we would urge the authorities to reassess the training needs of personnel handling weapons. Feigned sense of power and authority, and technical inadequacy may lead to similar deaths in future unless steps are taken immediately to put a brake on these.

## Drug Abuse among Students

There has been an 'alarming' rise in drug abuse by resident students of higher educational institutions in Dhaka city. The most unfortunate part of it is that even female students are addicted to drugs.

All this has been revealed in a survey conducted by an NGO under the programme 'Prevalence and patterns of substance abuse among residential institutions in Dhaka city'. More than 20 thousand students of 32 male and 12 female dormitories were surveyed over a period of one year. The startling revelation is that more than 40 per cent of the total number of students using drugs are workers and activists of students political organisations.

This is a very unhealthy trend that needs to be arrested somehow. There have been suggestions for a temporary moratorium on student politics, particularly of the variety which is patronised and guided by political parties of the country. The politicians and their parties are doing great harm to the future of this nation by giving the student cadres a kind of indulgence that is bound to make them into a spoilt generation. Parental control can hardly work where students are fed on an arrogance of power and pelf. It is now time for the politicians, publicists, narcotic experts, teachers and parents to persuade the students to shun the path of drug addiction by all means. Otherwise this nation may have to pay very dearly.

WITH the advent of e-mail, even in Dhaka, letter writing has become so and convenient. The best part of it is that it usually reaches the person instantly. One can also receive the reply within minutes. I write and receive dozens of e-mails every day from friends and non-friends alike, with a purpose or without — all sorts.

This morning, as usual, I checked my mail box. I had received several e-mails and many of them began or concluded: hope you are doing well. I checked the e-mails I had sent the day before and found that I also wrote the same words as a matter of routine. Hope you are doing well. It is perhaps just a polite expression. I thought differently. Like Newton's discovery from the falling apple, suddenly, I had a sort of revelation. Hope you are doing well. How do I do well? If one knew the golden rule, only then one could answer the all important question and satisfy the hope, repeated in so many e-mails, almost everyday.

If I was a student, the golden rule is well known: must do well in the examination. However, I could never do so since I was very bad at memorizing answers to ten important questions. Most of them used to be out of the syllabus of my limited memory. The other alternative would have been to carry notes inside my undergarments and copy the answers. Unfortunately, I could never gather enough courage to do so.

As a consequence, I never did well as a student. Thank God!

**I found the best approach to doing well prevails among Buddhist monks of Thailand. They possess no material desire. They simply crave for nothing... The monks are bound to do well. In a land of abundant food and their totally selfless lifestyle, it is absolutely pointless to ask if they are doing well — they simply cannot do otherwise.**

There was no e-mail in those days. Those student days are long gone. Now as a working person, am I doing well?

First as a government servant (actually, nobody's servant) my life falls into a fixed pattern. Variations are very few, if at all. Once in the office, everything falls into an event-less routine. First, read the newspapers over tea. After all the news of rape and arson and gossip, it is time to call up the colleagues and friends over telephone. Sometimes, few of them will drop in for a chat when any caller (unless it is my wife) will be told that I am busy in a meeting. This will be followed by a long break ostensibly for the purpose of prayers and lunch. At last if there are any files to be cleared, just write as proposed and sign. You see, no civil servant (neither civil nor servant) has ever been fired for not working. Salary will always be paid at the end of the month. So the question of doing well or not does not arise. There is no need to do anything at all.

If you are in private business, at the beginning, you may think that you should do well; otherwise, you may lose your shirt. However, the real-life situation is exactly the reverse of what it should be. If you do well, that is make a profit or a good income, the tax people will

be after you. They will try to suck you dry. A business man has to spend considerable time and effort and prove that he is doing badly. He is incurring heavy losses so that payments of taxes can be avoided and also get away from payment of over due loans to the banks.

In fact business people should strive to make out a case for subsidy from government;



## Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

for example, remission of payment of electricity bills.

The question of doing well in business is therefore a dangerous proposition. If you do well, you are doomed. In public, you must be doing badly. Otherwise, it is not only the tax people and bankers, your friends and foes alike will burn within with jealousy. They will pray for the death of success. Why anybody should do well in a disaster prone country?

How do I do well as a politician? Actually this is multimillion dollar question since you need that sort of money to be a successful politician. First,

like bad money driving out good money out of circulation, one should be notorious enough to drive out rival politicians out of the constituency. Remember, these are rivals within the same political party.

Next you deal with the rivals of other political parties. First try to finance the rivals to those rivals following the logic of the famous Arab proverb: the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

However, this is not enough. You create safe areas covering at least two-thirds of the constituency by funding gangsters at every nook and corner whose only responsibility will be to ensure that your rivals will not be allowed to set foot anywhere within the safe territory. Victory at the election is then assured.

You become a member of the parliament and authorized to hurl all sorts of abuse and insults in course of parliamentary debates.

This is the way you do well in politics. But Karl Marx is long dead.

# Sound Advice: It Works When Heeded

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

Nothing has changed for the better. Nine years ago, in May 1990, during Benazir Bhutto's first round, I was visited one evening by her henchmen of the prime minister and her husband, an officer of the grade of an SDM. He sent in his card which read 'Ahmad Fahim Mughal, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, Bilawal House, Karachi.'

He had come to see me, in his official capacity, about a huge highrise complex, 'Classic Homes,' of which he claimed to be a part owner, the others being 'Powerful Friends.' I had filed a suit against this illegal construction and the Sindh High Court had granted a stay. He very directly asked me to withdraw the suit and have the stay vacated at the next hearing of the case in three days time. If I did not do so, showing me his fist, he told me I would have to face the consequences.

The suit had actually been filed by 27 affected citizens, many of the 26 not accustomed to dealing with people such as Mughal and his bosses. Worried about their safety, I went to court the next morning to find my lawyer, Khalid Anwar, to ask him what could be done to save the others from potential harassment. Khalid told me that fifty per cent of our judges exist in fear of their rulers and were not likely to spring to our aid. Safety could only lie in exposing bullies who issued threats. His suggestion was that

I write to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, sending copies to the high office holders of the land, and spread the word in the press, which I did. I also wrote a column in the following Friday and no more was heard from Mughal — no further threats issued. Khalid had given sound advice: when threatened, expose the threatener.

Now, in 1999, on the morning of Sunday July 18, Moinuddin Khan, who had been brought in by the prime minister early in his second round to be chairman of the Central Board of Revenue and who has now reverted to his original business, banking, rang from Riyadh. He told me that his brother, Naemuddin Khan, an officer of the United Bank who dealt with bad debts and recoveries, had been abducted from his house in Karachi the night before by the FIA under instructions from Senator Saifur Rahman, head of the accountability bureau, the prime minister's chief trouble shooter. Naem's whereabouts were not known. Knowing how Najam Sethi and Hussain Haqqani had been recently treated, Moin was naturally worried. What could be done?

Ringing Saifur Rahman would not help as he would deny all knowledge or involvement. All that could be done was to file a writ of habeas corpus, though many of our judges are not aware of the meaning or importance of the urgency of this writ, and do not realize

that it must be heard as soon as a petitioner's advocate rises and announces that he has filed such a writ. Moin said that they had already decided to do this and that advocate Akram Shaikh was being instructed accordingly.

Senator Saifur Rahman, close confidante and friend of the prime minister from whose secretariat he operates, has taken upon himself the responsibility of ensuring that Nawaz Sharif and his government rule over us in perpetuity. Like the rest of the parliament, using his clout he had borrowed money from the government bank, UBL, in 1991, during Nawaz Sharif's first round and become a mill owner and industrialist. Some sums have been repaid but as of today he, his family, his textile mill and his business concern Redco owe UBL, from borrowings made in Pakistan and abroad, some Rs.1.4 billion (140 crores).

Before Nawaz Sharif came in for the second time, the loan repayments were rescheduled twice but the repayment schedule was not adhered to. Come Sharif and his second round, banker Zubayr Soomro was brought in to head UBL and the recovery process in all cases was activated. For the third time, Saifur Rahman's repayments were rescheduled, and yet again no repayments were made in time. Finally, UBL filed a recovery suit in the Lahore High Court and the harassment of Zubayr commenced. His safety

was guaranteed by the fact that he is the son of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ilaahi Bakhsh Soomro.

Saifur Rahman, in turn, filed a suit in the LHC against UBL, claiming damages, pleading that interest was un-Islamic, etc, etc. The suits are being heard. Then, about six weeks ago, Saifur Rahman filed a writ in Justice Malik Qayyum's court at the LHC seeking, inter alia, that proceedings in the UBL suit be stayed so as to give him time to approach the high-powered bankers' rescheduling committee. Justice Qayyum passed no orders.

The heads of seven banks and financing institutions forming the committee are: Shaikat Tareen, Habib; Mohammadman Soomro, National; Zubayr Soomro, United; Mian Mohammad Mansha, President, Muslim Commercial; Rashid Chaudhry, Allied; Mohammad Ali Khoja, PICIC; Bilal Shaikh, NDPC. This committee cannot take notice of any rescheduling until the affected bank itself refers the matter to it. This UBL has not so far done. Saifur Rahman can prevail upon five of the seven committee members (let each think he is one of the two).

In the meantime, Saifur Rahman managed to get one-time littefaq lawyer, Chaudhry Mohammad Farooq, who is also the Attorney-General of Pakistan, the first law officer of the people, to write to the Gov-

ernor of the State Bank asking him to direct the committee to consider questions relating to Saifur Rahman's unpaid loans. The State Bank has brought this letter to the committee's attention but so far it has taken no action.

In the meantime, on the orders of Saifur Rahman, the income tax authorities commenced harassing Naemuddin and his other brother, banker Bahaudin of Deutsche Bank. Saif rang Moinuddin in Riyadh on July 9 asking him to prevail upon Naemuddin to be reasonable. Moin told him his brother abided by his own norms.

On July 18, as soon as Zubayr learnt that Naemuddin had been abducted by the FIA, he moved to save his man. The first person he turned to was naturally his father, Ilaahi Bakhsh, who leapt into action, and found the prime minister at Lahore airport as he and his ninety hangers-on were about to board their special Umra flight. The prime minister took a second wise decision and instructed his Principal Secretary, Saeed Mehdi, to order the immediate release of Naemuddin, who had been flown from Karachi to Islamabad and lodged in Saifur Rahman's safe domed secretariat.

On July 22 when I rang Saif to ask him why he felt compelled to harass those who did not 'cooperate,' he denied all knowledge of Naemuddin's abduction. For good measure, he informed me that the previous day certain power-wielders of Islamabad were considering sending the federal police to collect me from Karachi and to ensure my presence before the Privileges Committee of the National Assembly. When I asked who they were, he would not name them, but told me he had restrained them from taking any such action. I had to refresh his memory.

ernment. Basically all the big critics of Grameen Bank are located within the country, perhaps with very little understanding of what it is.

I found the best approach to doing well prevails among Buddhist monks of Thailand. They possess no material desire. They simply crave for nothing. Apart from two pairs of saffron robes and a beggar's bowl, they own nothing in this world. Early in the morning, they beg for cooked food which they eat and also give others to eat. They spend their time in meditation or teaching at schools attached to each temple.

The monks are bound to do well. In a land of abundant food and their totally selfless lifestyle, it is absolutely pointless to ask if they are doing well — they simply cannot do otherwise. But of far greater importance is their role as Teachers of the Nation. They help in shaping the minds of future generations to be kind and considerate. Most important, Thai people admire the success of others.

They welcome foreigners to come and succeed as well. The monks also hold of foreign investment, among others, is therefore so obvious.

In contrast to that, burning jealousy is the agonizing reality of life in our country. It seems to be inherent in our culture and heritage. We hate success. We cannot tolerate anyone doing well in this country.

Henceforth, I have decided to scrupulously avoid writing in the e-mails; hope you are doing well.

## 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.

### Plight of sex workers

Sir, We are alarmed at the series of news items that are coming up everyday about the distressing condition of the exploited sex workers. The extent of torture and harassment perpetrated on them by the custodians and the law enforcing agencies bespeak eloquently of the gross violation of human rights and the deteriorating law and order situation of the country. The poor handling of the so-called rehabilitation of sex workers by the government will make a big dent in the already waning image of the government. Exemplary punishment to the persons at fault has to be meted out immediately. A concerned citizen, Dhaka

### "An Appeal to Our Conscience"

Sir, This refers to Dr A H Jaffor Ullah's 'Opinion' under the above heading in DS of 9th July 1999.

The justification or wisdom of buying expensive military hardware like the MiG-29, for a poor country like ours is questionable and by now has been questioned by many a conscious citizen. Equally questionable is the concept of making Bangladesh 'Switzerland of the East' (in military sense) unless we live in a paradise where all is well and 'Friendship to All and Enmity to None' is the divine dictum.

Dr Jaffor Ullah has put the blame on the 'Pakistan-trained Bangladesh Army' for over-militarisation by spreading anti-India feelings amongst the masses. I would like to remind him that the concept of this wasteful defence expenditure, in the name of modernisation was not floated during the rule of the two generals in Bangladesh, rather it is purely a political decision taken by the present government.

Secondly, about the Pakistan-trained military spreading anti-Indian feeling amongst the masses. In a country of 12

million the total strength of defence forces is around 150 thousand who are generally confined within the Cantonment having hardly any mass contact. This force even do not match the strength of today's political Cadre Force. How do you think this small military is moulding the minds of such large population? Bangladesh is a new nation but Bengalees are not. Whatever may be the mass feeling about their neighbours has a much deeper and older root. The writer's concept of secularism is only a textbook theory. There is nothing like secularism in human genes. The writer shouldn't also forget that the secular state of India has the second largest Army in Asia and their defence expenditure increases every year at a staggering pace. Thirdly, the concept of silent war of Economics: no missile, no nothing, all quiet in all fronts. I suggest the writer to send a copy of his recipe to Yugoslavia, Africa and Middle East too. I bet, they will immensely benefit from it.

Finally, being an optimist, I am ready to take Mr Jaffor Ullah's prescription only if he can tell me where and how to find the pills.

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Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

### It's time to clean up!

Sir, I would like to congratulate Mr. Mahfuz Anam for his commentary published on 16th July. In the commentary Mr. Anam boldly pointed out what Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should and should not do for the nation. He unveiled the truth saying that, 'Today a new chhatra dal is surrounding you. These people have no interest other than their own in mind. When they support you, it is not for you, your party, the ideals you propagate. They support you to get their interest served. At the end, they get the benefit and you get the blame.'

We still believe that our PM

will clean her office, her government and her party before it is too late.

Pradip Kumar Deb  
The University of Melbourne  
Australia

### Smoky concessions

Sir, Good news for abnormal personalities known as the smokers — one airline has arranged flight for Smokers Only (a long flight might last for five to ten hours), to balance the opposite facility 'No Smoking Zone' allowed for the non-smokers.

The UN offices are Smoke Free areas; a smoker has to go out of the boundary of the premises to smoke (and return, if an employee). So far the international agencies have not barred smokers from applying for any post. Some advertisements for job vacancies carry a logo at the bottom 'Females are encouraged to apply'. The smokers are apprehensive of another notice in the near future 'The posts are open to non-smokers only'. Would that be a democratic discrimination?

As for drinking alcohol, there are no restrictions or anti-campaigns, although the evil effects on the body and mind are well known, and these are of the same magnitude as the harmful effects of smoking. There is an additional symptom against the drinkers: getting drunk and out of control of the senses for limited periods, during which period serious criminal acts could be committed. Smokers do not get drunk and harm people. Inhaling passive anti-moral whiffs are ignored by the anti-smoking campaigners!

Although the right to smoke is conceded (to the adults), and smoking is not a criminal act socially or legally, the right for a place to smoke is denied publicly with increasing frequency; opening the debate for discrimination. The point at issue is a moral one, notwithstanding the stress on the health side. The BBC World Radio recently interviewed the head of a NGO agency looking after the rights of the smokers in the UK. The exchange of repartees was enjoyable.

The varieties and magnitude of the ills in any society (moral violations, crime, violence, frauds, etc) is of far greater dimensions than one single issue

of the ills of smoking. It may be a moot question from where the non-smokers derive the power to deprive the smokers (a very high percentage of the total adult population, and quite a lot of teenagers) of some fundamental rights which the other side wish to enjoy (do not disturb us with your weaknesses).

A Smoker  
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### Trade union

Sir, In most of the private sector organisations and other establishments there are no prescribed scale of pay and allowances, service rules and regulations and payment of pension or gratuity for the employees.

We consider it appropriate and reasonable to have trade unions in the private sector for cooperation, coordination and understanding between the employers and the employees and to protect the rights and interests of the employees for proper and sincere performance of works and duties, accountability and transparency of profit and loss of financial accounts.

At the same time due to various grounds and cogent reasons we feel that it is not necessary and justified to have trade unions in government offices, public sector corporations, nationalised banks and other establishments for better performance of duties and responsibilities, efficiency and maintenance of discipline.

Trade unions in government offices and public sector organisations create dual administration, law and order situation, inefficiency, corruption, dirty politics and wastage of colossal amount of public money.

There are prescribed scale of pay and allowances, service rules and regulations, discipline and conduct rules, pension or gratuity in government service and public sector organisations. Then why a handful of government employees or sector corporation employees create problems and obstructions, violate discipline, provide no service to the members of public and cause wastage of public money through trade unions?

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## OPINION

# Should We Call a Continuous Hartal to Save the Udyan?

Shahadat Hussain

I do not like any hartal (general strike). I believe, no sensible person or organisation has even any sympathy for any hartal unless called for a genuine cause under the scopes and circumstance of constitutional rights of the citizens.

I regret that such a grave non-political cause has arisen that calls for a nation-wide or Dhaka-wide continuous hartal in due time. If a government, elected by the people, turns to be despotic, disrespects the reasonable wishes and appeals of the intelligentsia and the common people of all walks of life alike, then the only legal and civil way which is left out to the people is to take recourse to call for a continuous hartal irrespective of any political partisan feeling inspite of causing colossal loss to the trade and industry as a whole and disruption of public life.

Mr Serajul Islam Chowdhury, an educationist of repute, has taken appreciable lead by organising a human-chain and also a walkathon lately to protest and save the Osmany Udyan from the axes and hacksaws of the government. Many environmentalists, philanthropists and most of the leading news media of the country have appealed to the government individually and through editorials for the same. Engr. Abul Hayat, a very popular artist of BTV has, in a noble way, appealed to the High Court for issuing a suemoto to restrict the government from its anti-environmental action. Mr Saleemul Huq, Executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advance Studies has even sounded a note of warning about the possibility of ugly confrontation with the public in his write-up in The Daily Star of June 08, 1999. Mr Haider Akbar Khan, Rono, a well-known politician, put in his observations in the Bengali daily

Bhorer Kaga) dated June 22, 1999. A roundtable conference was also held on the subject where poet Shamsur Rahman too sought to save the Udyan.

The government should, therefore, listen to reason and care for the sentiments of the people of all walks of life and urgently decide to shift the site for the proposed NAM Conference Centre elsewhere within Dhaka city or to places like Sharar or Gazipur of Joydebpur. The government should, without any excuse than to face a nation-wide or Dhaka-wide continuous hartal, if called by any of the organisers concerned. I am afraid that the whole nation, irrespective of any political identity, even the sensible persons of the party in power, will also join such a continuous hartal if the government does not pay any heed to the nation-wide protests and appeals and goes ahead with its axes and hacksaws to commit suicide. I presume that the ambassadors of the foreign embassies here, the representatives of the World Bank, I F M and other international organisations and institutions too will have no sympathy for the government for such obstinate suicidal debacle and will never blame the organisers of hartal for such a noble cause — save the trees, save the environment, specially in such a highly polluted, crowded and traffic-jammed city centre. The governments of the NAM countries, I am sure, will be sorry and help with the protesters when they will come to know the whole story and people's resistance.

I, therefore, sincerely hope that the government will come to senses and consider to shift the site of the proposed Conference Hall, leaving Osmany Udyan as-is as a resort and breathing space for the commoners of the Dhaka City.