

## Why This Violence?

WE had expressed our fear yesterday that the opposition sit-in programme may end in violence. Regrettably it did but thankfully with no deaths. The question is: why this violence? Eyewitness accounts prove that the main opposition BNP's sit-in programme was peaceful and disciplined. The gathering started from early morning and till about 1 p.m. nothing untoward happened. It was when the BNP chief was about a few minutes into her speech that the first cracker fell on the waiting riot police van behind the barbed wire barricade set up by them. Within seconds all hell broke loose and the BNP sit-in was showered with tear gas shells and rubber bullets. Normal bullets were also fired mostly by the police, and by the opposition, too, which left numerous people injured.

Why a peaceful demonstration was showered with tear gas and forced to turn violent? Abandoned trucks with deflated tires — a trademark tactics of a certain ruling party MP — were used to create road blocks on the Kanchpur bridge on the Dhaka-Narayangan road. This was done clearly to prevent opposition supporters from joining the programme at the city centre. This is not the first time that such things happened. To it, if we add the fact that every recent big demonstration organised by the opposition, especially the BNP, has been disrupted, then we get a clear picture that it has become impossible for the opposition to demonstrate peacefully. It is the duty of the government to ensure that the opposition enjoys the freedom to stage any sort of demonstration it likes as long as it is peaceful. Instead of ensuring that, we think, it is doing the very opposite.

While we hold the government fully responsible for failing to ensure the opposition's right to hold peaceful demonstrations, we seriously question the wisdom in latter's call for a three-day hartal. This programme comes from a revenge-mentality which, as we have said many times, instead of harming the government actually harms the people. In fact, their mind was already made up as we understood from press comments by opposition leaders, some of whom said that some hartals were 'overdue'. They must know of the damage to the economy, not to mention the individual and collective inconvenience, that will result from their action. But then who cares? The public sympathy that the opposition would have naturally gained from yesterday's action against them stands significantly eroded by their insensitivity to public interest.

We do not know who gained from yesterday's disruption and violence but we know who lost — the country and the people.

## Old Habits Die Hard

NINETEEN terrorists, who were trained after their surrender and posted at the Habiganj Ansar camp, have made good their escape from the camp, reports a Bangla daily on Sunday. The report also says that another 89 terrorists-turned-Ansars gradually abandoned their positions at Chittagong. On both occasions, it is reported, these renegades complained low pay and unhappy living conditions in the camps. Similar reports of desertion by them have been published in a number of newspapers in recent times.

We had sounded a note of caution against the government decision to train these terrorists and absorb them into a disciplined force like the Ansar. Such moves of rehabilitating anti-social elements in a civilised body are always fraught with manifold dangers. Chances of contamination always overwhelmingly tilt towards further evil. These terrorists who have been tuned to a life of indiscipline and a routine of terrorism, murder, arson and looting for the better part of their lives, can hardly revert to normal life and become disciplined citizens in a matter of weeks. These people needed proper medical care and psychiatric attention over a reasonable period of time and to be gradually allowed to take up normal human activities that included small business and trade, agriculture, poultry, fishery etc. Along with such activities for return to normal life they must be allowed to lead healthy family life surrounded by their spouses and children. After all human bondage can hardly be surpassed or overcome by any amount of training or discipline.

Without sounding glum or overcautious we want to register our concern about the present trend of the 'trained terrorists' leaving their quarters. It is not clear whether they took licenced arms with them. If that be the case then we must sound an alarm for the government and the ministry concerned in particular. Has the good intention of the government been misinterpreted by the misguided people? It is time the authorities took stock of the whole situation of rehabilitation and set the right foot forward in avoiding further disasters.

## IT Activism

INAUGURATION of the Computer City at the IDB Bhaban certainly provides the much-needed impetus to improve efficacy of the country's nascent IT industry towards developing into a multi-billion dollar spinner by the turn of the century. Also, it reflects the government's sincerity to make good on its promise for administrative measures to help the sector move ahead in the global IT race. The 100-shop city, designed to 'facilitate one-stop service for end-users in such areas as marketing, sales, software development, training, internet service and electronic commerce, speaks of a step in the right direction. However, for all its purposes, it is just the start and should entail more investment of complimentary efforts from the government and the private sector to make a niche in the huge IT market world-wide.

Thanks to Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, we have started thinking big on information technology. Electronic Commerce (E-commerce) is definitely a lucrative resource the country should gain access to. However, as has happened in the case of area-specific recommendations put forth by Jamilur Reza Commission, in absence of adequate administrative activism, there always remains a yawning gap between plans and execution. At the inauguration ceremony, Professor Chowdhury himself took the opportunity to remind the government of the immediate need for telecommunications infrastructure development for the growth of the IT sector. We would like to endorse his plea for steps from the government in this regard. IT industry unquestionably holds a great promise for a developing country like ours.

# The Upcoming Anti-missile Shield

*There are articulate groups of skeptics who believe that anti-missile systems anywhere are an irresponsible waste of money and it can only provide a false sense of security. Hitting a bullet will be devilishly hard whereas creating missiles that confuse interceptors through 'counter measures' will be easy. For example, Russia has boasted loudly that its latest long-range rocket, the Topol-M, can slip through any anti-missile shield.*

But, for the moment, it is particularly the North Korean missiles which have been the most worrisome to the panicked US and its allies in the Pacific. North Korea already panicked the American allies in the region by lobbing a rocket over Japan sea last year. Now she is threatening, at least theoretically, even the US by getting ready to test missiles that can range-wide hit Alaska. It is learnt that by using smaller warhead the same missiles will be able to reach California.

Iran is also assembling new multi-range missiles that could reach most of Europe. It already claims to have deployed in considerable number a missile that can hit Israel and part of Turkey. However, it does not necessarily mean that just by possessing capability either North Korea would carry out missile attacks on the US and her allies in East Asia or Iran would take on targets in Europe or elsewhere with its missiles which may still be very inaccurate.

Nonetheless, in Western perception the rockets in the hand of 'rogue regimes' often well connected with increasingly defiant Russia and China do pose immediate danger to American allies in the Middle East, Asia and elsewhere — if not directly to the US. So, there is a perceptible urge for an international network of anti-missile protection. Since last year's missile testing into Japan sea, Japan and the United States have been consid-

ering how to construct a joint anti-missile shield presumably based on Aegis radar system which both of them Navies use. South Korea wants to expand the scope of the missiles that it deploys against the country's northern foe. Taiwan, panicked by China's missile brandishing along the strait in 1996, wants to buy any anti-missile defence the US can offer. A missile tracking system that was good enough for Japan only would now cover a much wider area. In addition, the creation of an American dominated anti-missile shield is in the offing. It will include radar ships, inter-

ceptors and possibly airborne lasers covering much of the Pacific. Taiwan is also trying to be included in the network by buying some of the interceptors. Even in the United States itself every piece of bad news from the proliferation front — from last year's nuclear tests by India and Pakistan as well as the steadily growing range of Iranian and North Korean rockets — has tended to harden opinion in favour of spending more money on ballistic missile defence. Since the Reagan era's star war project which was intended to break the 'balance of terror' by covering America

with an anti missile shield — the issue has now been intensely divisive. To the Democrats, the proposition of a missile defence is at the best a gift to the arms industry and at the worst a provocation to Russia. The Republicans describe it as the vital protection for American soldiers abroad and American families at home. The Clinton Administration has tried to balance Russia's sensitivity to mounting pressure from American hawks to do something about the increasing missile threat. The result is a decision to immediately build upon a 'point of defence' which protects specific places — say, a military base — from incoming missile by knocking it out at a late stage in its descent. The system includes PAC-3, the latest version of 'Patriot' missile or a naval system that might be on American ships by year 2003.

At the other extreme lies the vision of a shield over the entire United States. The star war plan designed to build an impenetrable umbrella over all 50 states had been the most ambitious version of it. But to day when a 'national missile defence' is envisioned it usually points to a more modest shield able to ward off a few missiles from a few odd sources and not a massive missile attack by Russia as it used to be feared. Somewhere between these two extremes lies what has come to be called 'theatre' defences designed to protect overseas garrisons only from medium range missiles like those being tested in North Korea now. The defences will however be more sophisticated than PAC-3, the earlier version of which was tested in the Gulf war — by counter-attacking the incoming missile right in the space. The rockets are ideal for interception when they are of longer range and higher speed.

One of these intermediate systems known as THAAD (Theatre High Altitude Area Defence) is a pet project of the US Army. It is a hit-to-kill vehicle designed to vapourise the rocket with a head-on blow. Another system known as 'Navy Theatre Wide' can give a new boost to sea

power as a bastion of American strength. Both the systems are now in development stage and it is yet to be decided which one would ultimately be adopted.

In the meantime Israeli Aircraft Industries with American financial help has produced Arrow Weapon System for the same purpose. Compared to THAAD its interceptors are larger and therefore harder to transport by air. Unlike other systems the Arrow intercepts as the offending missile plunges through upper atmosphere and in the space. Israel is d-sirous of 'extending its anti-missile shield to neighbours like Jordan and Palestinian Authority (PA) neither of whom shows interest. Arrow's extension over Turkey is however a logical follow-up in view of the two countries' deepening strategic partnership. Whether or not this idea of extension materialises, a regional anti-missile network of sorts is likely to emerge as Arrow's sensors will probably be made capable of swapping data with nearby American shops, bases and spacecrafts.

Both in Israel and elsewhere there are however articulate groups of skeptics who believe that anti-missile systems anywhere are an irresponsible waste of money and it can only provide a false sense of security. Hitting a bullet will be devilishly hard whereas creating missiles that confuse interceptors through 'counter measures' will be easy. For example, Russia has boasted loudly that its latest long-range rocket, the Topol-M, can slip through any anti-missile shield. In spite of any amount of skepticism about the potentials of anti-missile shield there are few signs its worldwide surge will stop.

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## PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

modest anti-missile shield over America which does not placate either the Republicans or the Russians. The Russians are already furious and have threatened to 'perfect its strategic nuclear forces' in response. According to the Administration's decision at least seven separate systems designed to neutralise incoming missiles are being developed by the Pentagon. They will cost more than \$3 billion next year and the bill will rise sharply. So, how many sorts of anti-missile defences are there? Whatever may be their numbers, two extremes can be considered. There is a

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# Good Omen for Ruling Alliance

*Barring unforeseen developments, it seems that two main factors are bound to help the NDA to varying degrees in different states in India till the polls are over. There may be a reflection of this in the results unless things unexpectedly go awry for the ruling circles.*

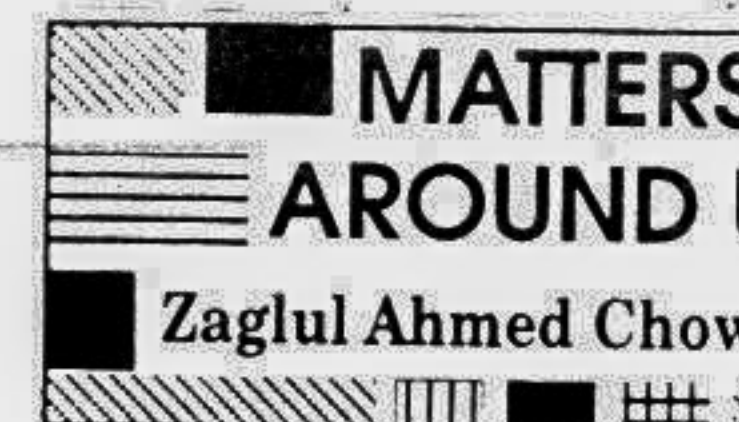
WITH the first phase of the Indian general elections covering 145 constituencies over and the last nearly three weeks away, speculation on whether the country will have a stable government, after all, continues to heighten. In recent times, the country has been overtaken by political instability, manifest in three general elections in as many years. Going by speculations and assessments, the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was the largest group in the dissolved house looks set to win the polls. However, the margin of a likely victory is a matter of varying opinion with some circles feeling that the alliance will secure more than the absolute majority needed to form a government. The magical figure is 273 and it is presumed that the NDA will be able to garner this number of seats unless there is a late swing in favour of the opposition, which seems rather unlikely at this point of time. At the later stage of balloting, some opinion polls predicted that the NDA may capture even up to 300 seats, much more than absolute majority. However, Indian election commission has banned such assessment since this may influence voting and affect transparency.

Major opposition, Congress and other opponents have contested these opinion polls, saying much of them are tailored to suit the designs of the ruling circles and only balloting will show actual realities on the ground. It is possible that there are elements of truth in the opposition contention. However, broad reading is that the NDA will secure an absolute majority and if not, at least a simple majority that may give it the right to stake claim for formation of the new government. The current administration headed by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is an interim one following the collapse of the Vajpayee government last April. Generally, an incumbent administration faces odds in elections but here is a rare case when it is credited with favourable conditions. What has led to this situation? What has really made the ruling circle comfortably disposed despite the fact that the multi-party government of Mr. Vajpayee did have plenty of failures when it was at the helm until its fall by a single vote? Why the election conditions have turned adverse for the opposition?

Three factors are clearly favouring the NDA and paradoxically, the most important of them came as an unexpected boon. When the government fell, the ruling alliance wanted elections as early as possible because it wanted to cash in on the popular sentiment that stemmed from opposition's failure to come out with an alternative administration. Two notable women figures of present-day Indian politics — Congress President Sonia Gandhi and the unpredictable but influential politician of the

Southern Tamil Nadu Jayaram Jaiyalitha — joined hands to trigger the downfall of the coalition while other smaller opposition parties also supported the bid. Jayalitha was a key partner of the government but her volte face helped the opposition to get rid of the Vajpayee authority. But contrary to earlier protestations that opposition parties will be able to form a new government, they failed to live up to the expectations and no new government came up even though President K. R. Narayanan gave ample

time for an alternative administration. This situation was undesirable since people did not want a fresh voting so soon. The opposition was on the defensive since their move to pull down the government and then fail to come up with a new one evidently forced the country towards new polls. It was a situation that most Indians did not like and they pointed accusing fingers at those who created this unstable condition. So, it emerged as a favourable factor for the BJP-led NDA and the alliance wanted to derive benefits



fairly long two months. It was a crisis that soared the government's popularity suddenly as most Indians considered, and still do, handling of the crisis by Prime Minister Vajpayee as pretty successful since the opponents in the conflict eventually withdrew from the scene providing the country with rare opportunity to boast of success. So, Kargil came as a big boost for the government and the delayed polls proved to be a great boon. The BJP wanted the polls to take place early so that it would seize the public support

that had emanated from 'undue' fall of government but it received tremendous bonus from the polls due to the Kargil crisis when voting is taking place as late as possible. Under the Indian constitution, a new Lok Sabha must come within maximum six months of the dissolution of the earlier one and October is the cut-off time. It is now coming up in October but unbelievably the late voting has helped the NDA.

The Kargil factor along with the opposition failure to form a government earlier are two clearly favourable omens for the ruling alliance. A recovery of the economy is also seen as a plus point for the administration particularly following the sanctions by some foreign countries and international institutions in the aftermath of last year's nuclear explosions. Increasing divisions within the ranks of opposition like split in the Janata Dal are causing setbacks for them. The Vajpayee government's track record during more than a year in power was not very satisfactory although a good leader in Mr. Vajpayee has always been a strong base. Communal incidents involving the Christians and certain comments by some leaders of the dominant BJP party enraged minority Muslims although the rainbow coalition government sought to put up a secular character. There were other failures as well but people liked the gov-

ernment's peace approach towards neighbours including arch-foe Pakistan when the prime minister took a landmark bus trip to Lahore. The Kargil conflict came at a later stage. Mr. Vajpayee and other leaders of the ruling alliance find it easier to explain their 'success' in the Kargil crisis and 'innocence' in the collapse of the coalition government while the opposition finds themselves on somewhat a slippery ground on these issues even though it vehemently contests contentions of the ruling circles. Admittedly, favourable conditions will not give the NDA a cakewalk because the opposition is putting up stiff resistance. Reports say that the opposition is slowly improving its position. But it may be a long way off. Opposition is also placing its points of view like that Vajpayee government failed in national security since the very fact that the 'infiltrators' could sneak into Indian side of the Line of Control (LOC) under the very nose of heavy Indian security itself is a major lapse of unpardonable magnitude.

Sections of people are also getting convinced by this kind of explanation but the influence of the fresh Indian success story in the conflict is such that it is proving critically advantageous for the NDA. Barring unforeseen developments, it seems that two main factors are bound to help the NDA to varying degrees in different states in India till the polls are over. There may be a reflection of this in the results unless things unexpectedly go awry for the ruling circles.

## 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.

### Cultural impact

Sir, West Bengal is under the process of being renamed Bangla; and, 'Bengal' Art and Culture is being officially promoted in Dhaka (news item DS Aug 23, 'art goes beyond boundaries'); in addition to the bilateral transshipment controversy between India and Bangladesh, by passing the regional modalities, and screening through local public opinion.

Watching West Bengal from Dhaka since 1948, it appears that during this span of almost half a century, the overall picture of degenerative trend in WB persists, in spite of the stable governance there for about two decades.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, there was a tinkling of optimism across the border, and the Bengalees in WB looked forward to the expected surge of regeneration in Bangladesh during the coming decades. But it was not to be, as we have not progressed much as a nation in 28 years. This despondency in the minds of the West Bengalees naturally create a vague uneasy feeling. The non-Bengalees in Calcutta have taken over a considerable share of trade, commerce and industry, financial investment and edged entry and foothold into other fields and institutions of income generation, as could be judged by the views of the Indian analysts appearing in the Indian press from time to time. The avenues for changes are being explored, but where are the potential openings for regenerative exercises?

Keeping SAARC in the background, and the materialistic intentions and goals of the western powers for global

domination of trade in the South Asian region, these urges for change by some quarters do not look mysterious. Man is always seeking change for the betterment of his condition for life. The controversies appear at the more mundane level of policy-making and executive stages in different environments.

Since the urge for optimistic changes cannot be suppressed, the national implications have to be monitored and analysed by the leaders of the society, whether in Calcutta or Dhaka.

Abul M Ahmad  
Dhaka

### Radio dramas on BT

Sir, The script-writing for radio and television dramas and skits are quite different as these two are different media, one dealing with sound/audio only (through the ears) and the other audio-video (through the eyes and the ears). The writers of the original stories have to put more punch and visual effects into TV stories and dramas. But everything should not be left to the imagination of the poor scriptwriters who have more on their hands and minds than they can handle in the developing countries, as the writers come from the middle class and are less mobile, and live in a small world where the pace of life is slow; hence there are a lot of indoor scenes and plenty of dialogue without action, thereby slowing down the pace of the story. In contrast, in the western imports, we see a lot of outdoor swinging and talking while on the move, outside the dreary drawing room (faster pace of life). Nowadays, digital

effects can be generated imaginatively, but at the present moment these new machines are being used as gadgets and toys (playing with it, be less over-enthusiastic).

The YEP analysis (DS Sept 3) tearing apart the makhhanbazi (palm greasing) of BTW was rightly enjoyable, but the negatively sensitised regime is behaving like the three proverbial monkeys in the reverse way (see no evil, hear no evil, and talk no evil). What the monitoring teams in BTW and the Ministry of IB are doing? Why professionals are not allowed to handle professional matters? There is too much politics (and bureaucracy) everywhere. Stop radio programmes on television. Who are listening?!

AZ  
Dhaka

### Illegal stranding and reckless driving

Sir, I would like to express my views about the illegal stranding and reckless 'tempo' driving at Jaikalmindir road (South of Bangabhaban).

Dhaka.

Here the road becomes almost blocked due to two illegal stands for Narayanganj-bound bus and passenger scooters service commonly known as 'tempo'. These scooters run at a breakneck speed using the wrong side of the road (as the other sides are blocked by stranded buses) causing terror to the passers-by and other light vehicles. At night, the situation turns worse as these scooters ply without headlights. General inclination of the scooter drivers are to overtake other vehicles using the wrong side violating traffic rules and collide with another vehicle. Hardly a day passes by without an accident of some sort.

The concerned authority should immediately take necessary steps to clear these illegal stands and stop the reckless tempo driving as well.

Mozibur Rahman  
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### Upgrade BAI

Sir, According to the information appeared in the July 1999 issue of 'APEAEN'

### Farooq Sobhan clarifies

Sir, The Daily Star published a front page article written by Anwarul Haque on 7 September, 1999 on the subject of Bangladesh's candidature for the post of Secretary General. The news analysis by Anwarul Haque is factually wrong and misleading and is calculated to give the impression that the government of Bangladesh is not doing enough to support Bangladesh's candidature for the post of Secretary General of the Commonwealth. On the contrary, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the Foreign Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our Missions abroad have done everything possible in support of our candidature. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has written letters to heads of states of Commonwealth countries which I have personally delivered as her Special Envoy. The PM has also at every possible opportunity raised the subject of our candidature in her meetings with Commonwealth leaders during the past two years.

The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh has separately written letters to all his counterparts in the Commonwealth and has personally spoken to many of them at different international conferences. The Foreign Minister has also personally written letters to heads of all Bangladesh Missions abroad instructing them to do everything possible to mobilise support for the candidature of Bangladesh. The Foreign Ministry and our missions abroad have in fact gone out of the way to canvass support. I would like to place on record the enormous support and assistance I have received from our heads of missions during my visits to various countries during the past one year.

In exactly two months time the elections for the post of Secretary General will take place at the Commonwealth Heads of Government's meeting in Durban, South Africa. Our prospects of success have certainly improved after the election of Mr Mike Moore of New Zealand to the post of DG WTO. The PM and Foreign Minister are fully aware of this. I am confident that during these remaining two months the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our missions abroad will further intensify their efforts to mobilise support for Bangladesh's candidature for the post of the Secretary General of the Commonwealth.

Farooq Sobhan  
Special Envoy to PM

pragmatic initiatives to upgrade this institute but all these initiatives have yet to yield a positive result.

It is sincerely expected that the government will take immediate step to upgrade this prestigious agri-educational institution of the country in the greater interest of the nation.

M Zahidul Haque  
Associate Professor, BAI  
& National Coordinator,  
APEAEN, Dhaka-1207

### Deteriorating roads

Sir, For the sake of accountability, transparency, performance of duties and responsibilities and utility of public money we would like to request the authorities concerned especially the ward commissioner, DCC, WASA, T&T, Titas Gas and Ministry of LGED to kindly let us know as to how many times the roads and streets, lanes and by-lanes, municipal drains, WASA sewage system, Titas Gas connections and T&T connections of Thattari Bazar-Captan Bazar area are required to be repaired or excavated in a year.

We would be further grateful if the authorities concerned also tell us about the respective expenditures yearwise for the last three years to examine and judge their respective efficiency, standard and quality of various works.

Once the roads and streets, lanes and by-lanes of Thattari Bazar-Captan Bazar area are excavated those are never filled in, repaired or recaptured for months together and the sufferings of the people know no bounds.

Would the DCC kindly pay attention to the ever deteriorating situation of these roads, streets, lanes and by-lanes and alleviate the untold sufferings of the people?

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