

# The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali  
Dhaka, Friday, November 5, 1999

## Politics of Dead-end: How Long?

**PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina and leader of the opposition Begum Zia are on warpath, this time gnashing their teeth as never before. From belligerence it is a war cry now. The government leader has virtually challenged the opposition to prove it can stop the city corporation polls scheduled for early next month. She has used very emphatic expressions like "no power on earth can stop the people from exercising their right to franchise" and "the administration will go by the election schedule" to make known her combative approach to the question. Although it is couched in a lofty expression of an ideal to defend people's right to vote, the field situation being what it is — namely, confrontational — she has basically drawn a rhetoric battleline vis-a-vis the opposition.**

The implacability of the opposition leader, on the other hand, is pronounced with her "must resist at any cost approach", apparently the only option she can think of after having sealed all routes to participation in the polls. Left even at that state of verbal confrontation, things would not have been so bad were it not for the highly vitriolic justification both leaders have offered for the stance they have taken against each other.

Sheikh Hasina has ridiculed 'Khaleda-Ershad unity' terming them as 'vote thieves', 'plunderers' of national wealth and protectors of convicts in the Bangabandhu murder case. She would have carried her point with the people, insofar as the allegation against 'ganging' up went, if in 1986 the AL had not participated in the elections called by Ershad and, secondly, if she had not ganged up with Ershad and the Jamaat against Khaleda Zia when the latter was the prime minister.

Begum Zia is equally determined and fiery in expounding her latest agitational policy. She wants the movement for ouster of the government spearheaded by the polls resistance programme which is ordained by her to be implemented by thana and ward level liaison committees at any cost.

In the perception of the opposition leader, toppling the elected government from power ought to be a 'question of life and death' to her followers; because in her words, India wants to bring the AL again to power so that it could complete the 'remaining task in favour of that country'.

We are concerned at the hardening of positions on both sides topped off by mutual vilification. The spirit of local government polls seems effectively killed. In such a torrid atmosphere how would the people feel enthused to go to the polling booths even if it is assumed that they will have decided whom to vote for. Neither the voter turn-out nor the poll results can do justice to the concept of a representative democratic election.

**What is so patently bad about the current ambience is the likelihood on both sides to be hiring musclemen to prepare for a showdown in the streets of pourasabhas with the result that people caught in the crossfire will have only the political parties to curse full throated.**

The option left for a turn-around in the situation is very limited. The Election Commission's hands are tied, it is only the Parliament which can change the rules about local polls deadlines. But the latter can only move in that direction if and when there is a basic commitment signalled by the opposition to the effect that it would participate in the polls when the dates will have been changed incorporating some of the safeguards they might like to see embodied. Unless the opposition gives a positive vibe to the ruling party by way of veering away from the hardline, the latter would not get any incentive to soften up to it and have the polls time-table rescheduled.

## Friday Mailbox

### Why hartal and for whom?

Sir, Nowadays, hartal is a common matter for our political parties. But we, the general people are affected by this negative political programme. This sort of irrational political tactics increase the suffering of the people. In the name of hartal, damaging political programmes cause economic loss of hundreds of crores of taka. Foreign investors get discouraged to invest in entering into such political action like strikes, sit-in and hartal. The country's garments industries have incurred direct losses of about 100 crore taka and was deprived of several crores in terms of order due to the recent hartal. During hartal, hundreds of factory workers sit idle but the owners have to pay the wages. Nothing is produced and transported. Banks don't function and the whole trading system collapses. So we would like to ask our political leaders — why this politics of hartal and for whom?

**Abu Gursel Siddiqui  
Senior Officer, Fex Dent  
AB Bank Ltd  
Station Road Branch, Chittagong**

### Transshipment

Sir, I have heard in a seminar on transshipment that the greatest hindrance in entering into the agreement on this issue is the "India fear". The "India fear" took place in the minds of the people of Bangladesh due to many factors. The foremost factor is the "border problem". But there is no study regarding this matter. According to me, "border problems" may be identified as below:

- 1) Cutting away of crops/taking away of valuables, cattle etc. by Indian people/Indian forces.
- 2) Grabbing of land belonging to Bangladesh by Indian people/Indian forces.
- 3) Killing of Bangladesh people by Indian people/forces.
- 4) Unprovoked firing by Indian forces.
- 5) Unsettled homestead problems of people of both the countries such as pond/kitchen of a Bangladeshi falling into the Indian land and vice versa.
- 6) Identifying the common rivers/canals and enclaves, problems of enclaves and miserable condition of the people of the enclaves.
- 7) Identifying the common rivers/canals and huge river waste carried by the flood waters. Economic and other sufferings caused by floods coming from upper stream.
- 8) Problems of Talpatti and other sea-beds and the fate of those that will rise in the future.
- 9) Cross-border smuggling and cross-border lawlessness.
- 10) Barbed wire fencing by India and consequent unhappy situation.

If a round table discussion is arranged by The Daily Star on the subject, the exact situation may be available. In that case, all the problems could be tagged and placed before the higher authority to arrive at the possibility of transshipment.

**Sultan Ahmed  
42, Bagichertek, West Rampura  
Dhaka-1719**

### Punishment for misuse of power

Sir, What happened in Pakistan was the enforcement of ad hoc and emergency corrective measures for continued and nonchalant misuse of political power and influence, an endemic disease associated with development of the human societies, simply because to err is human!

**Al-haj S M Khalid Chowdhury  
Dhaka**

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.

**PR**ESIDENT Shahabuddin Ahmed made a two-and-a-half-day official visit to Turkey and left a deep imprint on his host Turkish President, Suleyman Demirel. The Bangladeshi President has invited Demirel to return the visit and he has gladly accepted. It was a jam packed programme for President Ahmed. Shortly after his arrival at the Esenboga airport in Ankara, where he was received by Demirel, President Ahmed attended a welcoming ceremony at the Cankaya palace overlooking the Turkish capital. Demirel dwelt on the long lasting ties between the "brotherly countries" and underlined the remarkable role of Bangladesh's national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, who had created an everlasting bond between the people of Turkey and Bangladesh through his epic poem, 'Kamal Pasha' back in 1921. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was totally unknown even in Turkey and was fighting the War of Independence against the western occupation forces.

In his reply President Ahmed dwelt on the long-standing fraternal ties enjoyed by Turkey and Bangladesh and expressed his firm desire to see these grow and flourish further. The welcoming ceremony was quickly followed by a visit to the imposing mausoleum of Ataturk, which towers in quiet dignity above the Ankara skyline. As is customary, President Ahmed laid a wreath at Ataturk's tomb and signed the visitor's book. The Bangladeshi leader's delegation included Law Minister, Abdul Matin Khasru. That it was not a purely ceremonial visit was evident from the inclusion of the Foreign Secretary, Shaif Sami, in President Ahmed's entourage.

Indeed the afternoon of the arrival was largely devoted to substantive talks between the Bangladeshi and Turkish delegations headed by Presidents Ahmed and Demirel, respectively. There was perfect convergence of views on a broad range of issues and the two sides agreed that there was an urgent need for a push in order to take relations forward. President Demirel hosted a banquet in honour of President Ahmed at the Cankaya Palace and during his welcoming toast spoke warmly of Bangladesh. He especially drew the attention of his guests, which included Turkey's Armed Forces Chief, Huseyin Kivrikoglu, and Justice Minister, Hikmet Sami Turk, that President Ahmed who has been in office for more than three years was making his first visit abroad to Turkey. The Turkish President elicited warm applause from those Bangladeshis present when he closed his speech with the words 'Joi Bangla'.

President Ahmed was equally effusive in his response and stressed the need to develop economic ties between the two countries. On the second day of the visit, President Demirel turned 76 years old and

## President Shahabuddin Ahmed's Visit to Turkey

# Enhancing Relations

Turkey, which has a glorious past is firmly set on her present pro-secular course following the War of Independence waged under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Bangladesh, also with a glorious past, emerged a sovereign, independent state following a bloody war of liberation fought under the leadership of Banghabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation. As such the two nations have much in common.

President Ahmed presented him with a Bangladeshi landscape painting to mark the occasion. The morning began with the planting of saplings on the lush lawns of the Cankaya Palace, following which the two Presidents took a helicopter ride to the Golcuk region which was devastated by a massive earthquake on 17 August last.

Indeed, President Ahmed became the first head of state to visit Turkey following the earthquake, which killed more



## The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

than 17,000 people and wounded over 40,000. Overflying the region, President Ahmed saw thousands of prefabricated houses springing up in the area. The Turkish au-

thorities have set the ambitious target of providing a home for hundreds of thousands left homeless by the quake in advance of the harsh Anatolian winter.

President Demirel barely had the time to see off President Ahmed when President Aliyev of Azerbaijan arrived. President Aliyev has made it a practice to visit on his birthday. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union ten years ago, several Turkic states have appeared on the map and Turkey has built fraternal relations with them and also with Azerbaijan. There is an intense tug of war between Russia and Turkey to establish a pipeline to carry Azeri oil and gas

through their territories. President Aliyev who also came laden with gifts for the Turkish president, proposed publicly that Demirel who will conclude his first seven-year term in office in May 2000 should continue in office for another seven-year term. This would require amending the constitution which allows only a single presidential term. The Turkish Prime Minister, Bulent Ecevit, has already expressed his support for extending Demirel's mandate. With no serious contender in view, President Demirel stands a good chance of becoming the first Turkish President to serve a second year term.

President Ahmed spent the remaining part of his visit in Istanbul. He attended a dinner hosted by the Governor of Istanbul, Erol Cakir. The Governor, in his address, warmly welcomed the Bangladeshi President and his delegation and pointed out the significant contribution of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in settling problems with her neighbours including the solution of the problem of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. He pointed out that Prime Minister Hasina's efforts were rewarded by the UNESCO, which had awarded her a peace prize. President Ahmed for his part dwelt on the historical heritage of Istanbul and its beauty and expressed his good wishes for the brotherly people of Turkey.

The following day was spent on sight seeing particularly such historical places as the Topkapi Palace, abode of the Ottoman sultans, the Blue Mosque and the Saint Sophia Church built in the sixth century by the Byzantine Emperor, Constantine. Turkey is celebrating this year 700 years of the Ottoman Empire. The earthquake has dampened somewhat the celebrations but the Turkish spirit is, nonetheless, alive.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed's first foreign trip beginning with Turkey augurs well for the development of bilateral relations between these two countries. Turkey, which has a glorious past is firmly set on her present pro-secular course following the War of Independence waged under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Bangladesh, also with a glorious past, emerged a sovereign, independent state following a bloody war of liberation fought under the leadership of Banghabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation. As such the two nations have much in common and President Ahmed's visit has been rich in symbolism in this regard.



President Shahabuddin Ahmed and his counterpart Suleyman Demirel addressing a joint press conference in Ankara on Sunday. — Photo: PID

## Burn, Baby, Burn

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

**'BURN, baby, burn'** was the black extremist slogan during the Los Angeles riots in August 1965. It was the war cry of the underdogs, the wailing of the oppressed, who scurried through the streets of the city burning and looting in desperate frenzy to protest the white domination. That apocalyptic roar echoed in the fracas, which ensued when students of Dhaka University turned upon Dhaka Medical College over the death of their classmate and attacked everything that came their way. It was as if the hospital had suddenly turned into the linchpin of everything corrupt and the students wanted to lash out at its frustrating foundation.

Less than a week later that scene repeated itself, when a youth leader, taken to Dhaka Medical College with gunshot wounds, was announced dead by the doctors. The bereaved friends, relatives and supporters of the deceased turned their grief into anger and stormed the hospital. When a society seethes with free-floating anxiety, it becomes difficult to draw the line between regret and rage, because everything that hurts also humiliates as the pain provokes a perverse petulance in the precarious psychology of anguished minds.

In each case the protesters protested not the death of their loved one, but its cause. A meritorious student died because doctors and nurses in one of the foremost healthcare facilities of the country didn't pay attention to his serious condition. And, a promising youth, who

aspired to become a political figure in his neighbourhood, would be shot and hacked by unidentified assailants. In so much as we all understand that death is managed from other side of the grave, it is difficult to reconcile its tragedy when caused by an obvious failure on this side.

Thus the angry mobs hitting out at doctors and nurses were actually hitting out at the society, which failed to meet their expectations. There must be some kind of psycho-social combustion that fires up the adrenaline of a demonstrator who erupts in rage and wants to tear down everything. Lately, car bashing has become a common expression of that rage. The political activists turn their frustrations on windshields if attacked by rival groups or thwarted by police. The students smash cars if they don't like a schedule of examinations. If a certain team loses in a game, the supporters would go bonkers at the cars on the streets. Perhaps, a glass is the most fragile obstruction to break while the shattering sound of its falling pieces readily brings affirmation that the protester has knocked something down.

Most of that knocking down comes from the students, because they are usually at the peak of physical energy, desperately searching for identity, freedom and power. In the wake of the siege of Harvard University in 1969 by the members of Students for a Democratic Soci-

ety and the pro-Mao Progressive Labour Party, the *Fortune* magazine had conducted a poll on student psychology. The poll showed that 40 per cent of students entered college with the hope of bringing about changes in the world. A part of that psychology may have to do more with romanticism than reformation as a student wrote at Sorbonne in the late 60s, "The more I make love, the more I make love, the more I make love, the more I make love."

Therefore, youth is somewhat a contradiction in terms within its own ecstasy; it wants to destroy in order to create. The western societies have discovered antidote to that contradiction by providing intellectual fulfillment through learning under the guidance of an admirable teacher. In the 14th century England, a mere dozen college students lived and learned together with a single master. In the early 20th century, US colleges coped with campus violence by offering elective courses and extracurricular activities. These arrangements were supplemented by the assumption of parental role by the colleges and creation of a national campaign that education was salvation.

The growing incidence of vandalism in protests has added a new dimension to the visceral violence in our society, while much of that violence is seeded in the senseless world which surrounds today's young and restless. In a world devoid of ideals, scruples, models,

missions, values and virtues, where the purpose of life is mainly defined by need, greed and speed, the formative minds are vulnerable to the consequent ecology of evil. That evil persuades its targets that patience and tolerance are not necessary to attain goals, that instant gratification is more important than ultimate success, and that sacrifice is procrastination of ideals. So, the youths learn that nothing works faster than the barrel of a gun or the blade of a knife in a world susceptible either to fear or favour.

The Bible says in the *Lamentations* (chapter 3, verse 27) that, "It's good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." In a way, our youths are bearing the heaviest burden in their chests because they are compelled to live in a world they can neither accept nor change. If the students attacked cars and people over the pitiful death of a classmate, it was because they couldn't accept the fact that one of them should have died in outrageous neglect. When the followers of the dead leader ransacked the hospital, it was because they could not hold the frustration that boiled in their hearts. The protesters who want to change a government feel despair when obstructed by police in their demonstration, and take it out on fragile glass.

Now that despair is being taken out in a more alarming manner. A police sergeant was killed while in pursuit of snatchers in Motijheel. The miscreants, interceded in their

flight, ganged up on the police officer and left him mortally wounded. In Uttara, a youth showed the muzzle of his gun and fired into the mouth of his enemy. These are perhaps indications that the free-floating anxiety in our society is coming to its boiling point. Horace, a poet in ancient Rome, called anger the short version of madness. The anger is getting stretched these days while the society is slipping into a terrible madhouse.

More than 300 gamma-ray bursts occur each year throughout the cosmos. One explanation says that these bursts take place when burned-out ordinary stars collide with each other and release as much energy as a thousand hydrogen bombs. When millions of young men in our country collide with one another, God knows how many could be stars burn out and release energy in their angry outbursts while keeping the country rolling with an endless cycle of death and violence! Showkat Osman, the quirky Bengali writer, once wrote in *Nobin*, the house magazine of now defunct BCC Foundation, that dung becomes manure after it's thoroughly rotten. The only hope we have in this era of evil is that it will pass away soon and for that matter we need to escalate it all the way. Let's chant the black extremists slogan to exhort our youths so that they will burn what they must to arrive at the end of their destructive urge. The sooner that happens, the sooner they can start working on a better world.

## Nawaz Sharif's Nightmare

by Mir Lutful Kabir Saadi

**PAKISTAN'S** ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif himself entered into confrontation with the institutions of the state and behaved like an emperor and potentate. He forgot that Pakistan is a republic and he was elected as a prime minister by the parliament. He had become somewhat imperial and entered into confrontation with the President and eventually with the Army. This was observed by many political analysts and also politicians of Pakistan regarding ouster of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Several military officers who took sides with the deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif are likely to be tried in a military court as military authorities are looking into the matter seriously. Three key military officers apart from others have been arrested immediately after the coup. They are Lt Gen. Khawaja Ziauddin, Lt Gen. Tariq Pervez and Brigadier Javed Malik. They were on duty and made a clear attempt to implement the orders of the prime minister who had fired Army Chief General Pervez Musharraf on October 12.

isthan pointed out that what happened in Islamabad was the result of a long and dangerous conspiracy. Lt General Ziauddin was called to the Prime Minister's house and promoted to the post of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) by announcing forced retirement of General Musharraf. The ousted prime minister's military secretary Javed Malik, played an important role in this conspiracy.

The legal status of Chief of the Army Staff General Pervez Musharraf's 'retirement' by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appeared to have a weak grounding in view of legal formalities laid down in Section 20 (part II) of the Pakistan Army Act (PAA) which deals with the termination of commissioned officers. According to Pakistani legal experts on military affairs, no commissioned officer of Pakistan Army can either be dismissed or retired from service without going into legal formalities laid down in the PAA. These formalities include a proper inquiry against the officer and the establishment of facts.

dismissal of commissioned officers while they are serving out of Pakistan. The relevant clause, as mentioned in Chapter III of the Army act, entitled 'Termination of service' gives room for the officer's return to Pakistan and fulfillment of certain other legal formalities. A dismissal order, therefore, would have no legal effect until and unless these formalities are followed by the competent authority while issuing an order.

The legal procedure has not been followed in COAS Pervez Musharraf's ouster, as the competent authority to make such a decision is the President, and not the Prime Minister.

However, there is no confusion about the fact that the COAS was on official visit to Sri Lanka when the orders of his retirement with immediate effect were issued. The notification was issued at 3:40 p.m. while the COAS landed at the Karachi airport at 7:47 p.m. an hour later than the scheduled time as the Karachi tower initially denied permission to land. At 4:00 p.m., PTV and Pakistan Radio broadcast the news. The COAS was replaced

by General Khawaja Ziauddin. No proper inquiry was conducted in the case of the COAS and nothing was established against him. While certain other legal loopholes were also left unplugged.

Within half an hour of his surreptitious climb to the post of the Chief of Army Staff, the former Inter-Services Intelligence chief, General Khawaja Ziauddin knew that the Army he was supposed to lead was not prepared to accept his command. All of Ziauddin's phone calls to the Corps Commanders and the Chief of General Staff — placed from the Prime Minister's House in Islamabad — drew a blank, a reaction that almost instantly drew down the curtain on former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's second term in office.

Even a layman in Pakistan is aware that any operation of this sort can never be completed without the active support of the troops and commanders posted in the cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. It was foolish for the former Prime Minister not to beware that his nominee for the post of Army

chief didn't have the key support of the 10 corps and more specifically the 111 brigade," said an Army official to the Pakistani press.

It was alleged that Lt. Gen. Ziauddin was the architect of the secret operation that envisioned the official announcement of his promotion to the post of COAS once Gen. Pervez Musharraf boarded PIA flight in Colombo for a journey that severed his contact with GHQ for a good 200 minutes. Lt. Gen. Ziauddin, along with the former principal secretary Saeed Mehdi, had suggested to Nawaz Sharif that General Pervez Musharraf's plane must not be allowed to land at Karachi so that he could be arrested at any other less busy airports in Sindh.

Lt. Gen. Ziauddin had assured Nawaz Sharif that he would gain the full command of the Army much before that landing of General Pervez Musharraf's plane at Karachi airport, a dream that suddenly transform into Sharif and Ziauddin's worst nightmare.

The writer is local correspondent to Impact International Magazine, UK and Gemini News Service, UK.