

PM Insults Herself

IT was a sad day in the history of our parliamentary democracy. It was a day when the sacred (or is it?) Our leaders do not seem to think so) premises of Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) once again became the venue of a vicious attack on the character of the leader of the opposition. In her concluding speech to the 15th session of the Prime Minister broke all norms of decency in castigating the leader of the largest opposition party inside the House. In a shameful personal attack Sheikh Hasina cast aspersions on the character of Begum Zia making unprintable innuendoes in reference to an event that happened during the anti-Ershad movement in 1987.

The Prime Minister, in our view, has insulted her office, her person and the parliament in making the type of speech that she made. In our view she gave a very poor account of her own level of taste and sensibilities by making remarks about Khaleda Zia's moral character, education and her family background. She lowered further the already abysmally low level of taste and sophistication that is currently seen in our politics. She often boasts of raising Bangladesh's image abroad. Think what sort of impression the world will get about our taste, our culture and our values when they will read how a sitting Prime Minister speaks in such a denigrating manner about her predecessor.

Will there be no bar in what will be said about political opponents? What sort of values are we giving to our children by reducing our political parlance to this gutter level? We know that Sheikh Hasina does not like Begum Zia. But is this the way to express one's dislike? When will the PM learn that her feelings about her opponent is not relevant? What is relevant is the fact that Begum Zia leads a party that was elected to run the country for five years in 1991 and got 34 per cent of the votes in 1996, when Sheikh Hasina's party got 37 per cent. She may hate her to the core, but the reality is that she will have to deal with her, just as Khaleda Zia had to deal with Sheikh Hasina when the former was the PM.

We believe that the PM's speech in the parliament is totally contrary to the spirit of dialogue that she called for on the same occasion. How can you insult somebody so thoroughly and expect that person to participate in a dialogue? In normal circumstances we would have asked for an apology. But we know that we have lowered ourselves far too much to expect that. The ruling party must understand that if they want any meaningful dialogue with the opposition then they MUST STOP INSULTING THEM. If there is no immediate and radical change of AL and Sheikh Hasina's behaviour then we will know that her calls for a dialogue is not sincere at all.

Wolf in the Garb of Lamb?

THE leaders of BNP at Chittagong appear caught in an intriguing situation. A gang of lungi-clad people, mostly young, has been posing problems for pro-hartal activists in particular. These people are creating situations, which obviously are not to the liking of the BNP leaders and they have asked for police help against the members of the 'lungi bahini' (lungi force) as they are identified. BNP leader Mir Nasir's request for help has been acknowledged by the Officer Incharge of Kotwali thana. These people have become a pain in the neck for the opposition as they carry on rampage during the hartal on their own without caring for the instruction of the leaders. They take food in the restaurants without paying bills and the owners don't complain for fear of reprisal. The situation has become so menacing that the opposition did not bring out procession from Lalbagh Maidan after the public meeting to avoid these people. They have also been alleged to have actively participated in destroying a large number of garbage carrying trucks of the Chittagong City Corporation. This will create conservancy problem in the port city in the coming days to the detriment of public health and sanitation.

The question that automatically comes into mind is: who are these people? Only in the recent past we have read about the retaliatory story of dumping garbage in front of the former mayor's residence. And it was clear who masterminded that filthy feat. Is the present situation a creation of the same coterie to discredit the opposition? The role these renegades are playing can only cause tremendous damage to their mentors and in final analysis this apparent tactic of spoiling opposition's movement by creating public health hazards may take its own toll much to the detriment of the interest of the party in power.

Since the opposition has disowned these questionable characters and complained to the police, we hope the law enforcers will take proper cognisance of their offences and take proper action without fail. Any dilly-dallying on their part can give rise to fresh suspicion about their real identity.

Hospital Management

HEALTH for all by the year 2000 seems to have become a distant dream. While there are much talk of improved health and sanitation, reality tells a different story. Disruption of water supply at Narayanganj Hospital is a classic example of what goes on in the healthcare system.

When the submersible water pump showed signs of technical problems, water supply came to a standstill. It is noteworthy that a similar problem occurred last year, and there was no water for fifteen days. According to the hospital superintendent, an overhead water tank and an ordinary pump would solve the problem. However, there has so far been no initiative from the government to help solve the matter.

Owing to this, the operation theatre was inoperative, as were the laboratories. While some patients were able to buy bottled water for their use, others had to rely on a nearby pond! Now the question that looms is, who will be responsible for the diseases that may originate from use of contaminated pond water?

The Health Ministry should be accountable for such shortcomings. Even if the problem in itself is not too large, when considered in a broader context of hundreds of people falling prey to such inefficiencies, it is disdainful and despicable. There may be many such hospitals in suburban areas that are facing similar problems. We need to know of such constraints and drawbacks and thereby find a cure to that, at the earliest. And to have a long-term solution the Health Ministry must be the key-player in straightening anomalies, if any.

Terror in Dhaka Streets: Who are Responsible?

In spite of the primary responsibility resting on the ruling party for the rude repression of political opposition, the police authorities in general cannot also absolve themselves of their responsibility for excesses and violent acts of partisanship.

THE two-day hartal called by the 4-party combine of opposition political parties was observed throughout Bangladesh on the 7th and 8th of November. It was extended by another day due to the severe police repression on demonstrators on the second day. The success of the hartal was viewed obviously as differently by the ruling party and the opposition as their views rest on some of the major political issues. Still the hartal was generally observed, despite immense mobilization of anti-hartal demonstrations and unprecedented deployment of police force in the capital in an abortive attempt to persuade traders and others to continue with their business and vocation as usual.

The purpose of the hartal on the 7th was to protest against the government's decision to cancel holiday on the 7th November the National Solidarity and Revolution Day, which the BNP supporters observe as the anniversary of the day of deliverance. On this day 24 years ago, a short-lived coup attempt by what was termed as anti-national pro-Indian and anti-democratic pro-one-party BAKSHAL elements was foiled by men of arms in the Cantonment and supported by rejoicing citizens in Dhaka streets. The day was also marked by the freedom of the then Chief of Army Staff, General Zia, from his 3-day captivity by overthrowing the coup instigators. The hartal on the second day was called in protest against the holding of elections in three cities, despite the belated cancellation of the election schedule declared earlier.

The first day of the hartal went off without grave incidents. It was the second day when the real trouble brewed

and erupted in a violent manner. A housewife, Rina Begum, while watching police action against picketers and demonstrators from the first floor- verandah of her house was killed by gunshot. The police in an official statement claimed that it was the BNP demonstrators who shot the housewife dead, as the pellets of shotguns used by the police could not reach the first floor of the house. Home Minister also corroborated the police statement in the parliament to the effect that BNP demonstrators killed the young lady. Eyewitnesses, on the other hand, as reported in the press, suggested that shots were being fired at in random from a police riot vehicle in the general direction of demonstrators and one of these shots hit and killed the innocent housewife.

This sparked great commotion and generated anger among people in the locality. The BNP brought out a procession in protest that was led by their Mayoral aspirant for Dhaka city and popular leader Sadeq Hossain Khoka MP, former Minister Abdullah al-Noman, Zainal Abedin Farooq MP, besides others. Shortly thereafter these three BNP leaders were hit by rifle and shotgun fire by the police, some allegedly standing on the roadside. Khoka was hit by six rubber bullets from close range and several others received bullet and shotgun wounds requiring them to be hospitalized. Several hundred opposition demonstrators and workers became casualty during the 3-day hartal all over the country. The police stated they had

been attacked by demonstrators with bricks, gun shots and bombs and had to act in self-defence. They, therefore, indicated that the shots that injured BNP leaders and supporters were, in fact, fired by the police themselves. Again, one can never justify police action to lock up the BNP headquarters, holding the inmates captive for hours and preventing BNP leaders and legislators from entering their office. There was no provocation and lawful authority to warrant such action. On the contrary, the police filed cases against Khoka, No-

is both impractical and ridiculous to buy the postulate that the BNP leaders on the front row of a demonstration were marching the streets, pelting stones and firing shots at the police who in self-defence attempted to gun down these leaders. Without warning and contrary to resorting to the usual practice of firing blank shots and aiming at legs, the police fired at the vulnerable parts of the body, heads and chests, of the victims from close range. Would it be incorrect to assume that the intent of the police action was to kill the vic-

high level. If the government refuses to do so, one can obviously surmise there exists much to hide.

In this context, one cannot gloss over the role of the police in controlling and suppressing opposition political parties in course of the letter's lawful democratic pursuit of staging peaceful demonstrations and following other methods of political movement. We all are well aware that the police and the administrative machinery are required to act on the orders and directives of the ruling political party. In the process, they somehow go along in helping the latter in promoting its political interests. In the process, if their actions manifest a little tilt in favour of the ruling party, it may be tolerated by many, provided the tilt is marginal and is within the limits set by law of the land, moral values and democratic practices.

On the other hand, if the limit is exceeded, the question arises of the need for accountability of their actions. People consider it most unfortunate that the police force, with notable exceptions, on a number of occasions and in a number of places in the country have turned themselves into veritable tools in the hands of the present ruling party. There were instances when the police had acted as accomplice and gave protection to terrorists, specially the Awami terrorists, who were allowed to attack opposition demonstrators while enjoying police protection. Several other photographs of such unidentified, un-marked plain-

clothes gun trotting hoodlums in different postures during the past hartals were published in newspapers and corroborate such allegation. Otherwise, the widely photographed, easily recognized Liton who was poised to attack a BNP demonstrator after snatching a rifle-shooter gun from a policeman several months ago, would not now roam around freely in the streets. Police would take no action against such easily identifiable terrorists belonging to the ruling party. One does not know whether it is greed or fear or a combination of both that has goaded a section of the police force to act in an unlawful, high-handed and partisan manner as they did.

Yet, in spite of the primary responsibility resting on the ruling party for the rude repression of political opposition, the police authorities in general cannot also absolve themselves of their responsibility for excesses and violent acts of partisanship. The Leader of the Opposition has since made a statement to the effect that the police must not act as a slave to the government party, but should devote themselves to serve the people. The Awami League government before the June 1996 parliamentary election already politicized country's Civil Service and sought to destroy its laudable tradition of neutrality. The acts of the British-fame Civil Service had hitherto been legendary for their fairness and impartiality in action and constituted a matter of immense gratification and pride for all. Let the police force ponder a while and not fall in the same trap as some of the members of the Civil Service had fallen in 1996.

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Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

man, Farooq and others, who had been physically attacked and injured by the same law enforcing authorities. What does it imply? Perhaps, the principle of aggression being the best policy of defence has been applied in this case in a futile attempt to hoodwink people.

These unfortunate incidents evidently have brought about serious frustration and utter disappointment in the minds of the vast multitude of the people who aspire a peaceful, stable and tolerant society for the creation of an atmosphere congenial for meeting the rising expectation and imperative need for promoting democracy and development in the country. It

times?

It was also strange that none of the journalists and photo-journalists who were present on the scene in a good number failed to witness incidents to substantiate police claims, but they themselves became objects of police brutality and suffered injury for no rhyme or reason. One can, no doubt, ascertain without much difficulty the nature and specifications of the bullet or the pellet that killed the unlucky housewife if needed, by performing autopsy of her body, which was hurriedly buried by the police. All these incidents of police action and non-action could be investigated into and judged properly by holding a judicial inquiry at

Jinnah's Pakistan

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

"You are free, free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the State."

rod of time."

No doubt the judiciary will judge wisely and well. Now, what makes a democrat. A baggy shalwar, a kamiz, and an unbuttonable waistcoat covering what is known as a 'healthy' (meaning overfed) body? Does a uniform prevent fit and trim man from being a democrat?

We should count ourselves fortunate that we have a man who received a liberal education at St Patrick's High School in Karachi, taught by Father Stephen Raymond, Ossie Nazareth and the likes of such men to differentiate right from wrong, religion from religiosity, good from bad, and to appreciate and experience what life has to offer. After matriculating he went to study at Foreman Christian College at Lahore. This man, we feel, will not follow the dictatorial and democratic pattern of enlisting religion on his side, or if the religious leaders are not compliant, going to the extent of foisting upon us a new kind of perverted religion subservient to his ends. We must trust that he will do his best to rebuild Pakistan as envisaged by its founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

US Ambassador William Milam on November 5 in Islamabad whilst speaking at a conference on American Stud-

ies stated that America is not anti-Islamic, and that the present change in the country could be used as an opportunity to return to the vision which Mr Jinnah had for Pakistan."

General Pervez Musharraf was four-year-old, getting ready to go to school, when Jinnah on August 11, 1947 enunciated his 'creed' to his constituent assembly meeting for the first time at Karachi. This speech was a fine bit of rhetoric, but far too moral, truly democratic, free of bigotry and loaded with justice to be able to be digested by the philistines of that era and by those who have followed down the fifty-two degenerative years. Far too many loyal Pakistanis who have occupied leadership roles from the day Jinnah died right down to the end of this century would have been far more at ease had he never made this particular speech. It has inspired fear in successive governments, has been a point of bitter dissent in its interpretation, and has even been officially distorted in print. It has been this nation's misfortune that we have never, after Jinnah's lifetime, showed the slightest desire to live up to the principles he set for us.

Before the flag of Pakistan had even been hoisted, that August day he told the future legislators: "You are free, free to go to

your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the State."

Now, this particular passage has always been the main bugbear of the insecure, the feeble of faith, and the cowards who live by self-deception. The very next day it was found to be too irksome, it inspired fear.

In his speech, Jinnah also proclaimed that "the first duty of a government is to maintain law and order, so that life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the State." Amongst the evils "which he vowed would not be tolerated were bribery, corruption, blackmarketing, and "this great evil — the evil of nepotism and jobbery."

The definition of 'jobbery' — the practice of corruptly turning a public office, trust, etc. to private gain or advantage; the perpetration of jobs. Such is the daily bread of powermongers. What Jinnah failed to foresee was that within less than two years such practices would be just a few of the prerequisites for the survival and maintenance of power of those who would rule after him.

Fortunately for him, Jinnah did not live long enough to see his dream betrayed by men un-

worthy even to utter his name. He died before total disillusionment could set in (though he had his suspicions that it was on its way) and broke his heart. From what we know of him, he was that rare being, an incorruptible man in all the many varied meanings of the word corruption, purchasable by no other, swayed by no other, perverted by no other; a man of honour, integrity and high ideals. That the majority of his countrymen have been found wanting in these qualities is this country's tragedy.

What the General must now remember is that Jinnah also failed to perceive in his countrymen their penchant for pernicious sycophancy, the malignant weapon of the ambitious, that was to drag down many a

man, make fools of many more, and with which leaders of this nation have found themselves unfit to combat. They succumb, time after time.

Power seekers are adept in the art of sycophancy, if adept in nothing else. Declarations of 'my imperishable and devoted loyalty' you are not merely an individual, but an institution; your services are indispensable for the greater good of the country; you embody the national interest; all roll glibly off many servile tongues, and are transferred with the greatest of ease from each transient master to the next. The supreme example of adulation:

When the history of this country is written by objective historians, your name will be placed even before that of Mr Jinnah. Written to Iskander Mirza by loyal Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, is closely rivalled by Mushahid Hussain's declaration that the Muslim Leaguers were but 'slaves of Mian Nawaz Sharif's thoughts.'

OPINION

Cricket: Pre-qualifications for Test Status

Alif Zabr

As a spectator watching on the TV screen the Bangladesh-England-A cricket matches, here are some observations from a non-expert.

— There is more to batting than trying to defend, and trying to score. Forget the word 'effortless' — while to be done is carried out effortlessly, intuitively, with minimum energy. That's how Lara scored a hundred in 45 balls. In other words, the reflex action has to be developed through practice, practice, and practice.

— The batsmen must learn to push and lob the ball into the gaps and steal singles (in this case stealing is not an offence). That means controlled and directional batting. The batting techniques have to be fine-tuned. Thus many singles did not materialise, and England-A won the first one-day match in the very last over.

— There is a tendency and temptation to nibble outside the off stump, a basic and elementary fault, which is normally corrected and controlled during the first phase of training, otherwise it becomes a subconscious reaction and a bad habit. The temptation to hook aimlessly has to be curbed; try low-profile hooking (near the ball on the ground). Habits, once developed, are difficult to eradicate. Hence the initial coaching has to be critical. But we have no coaching network in the schools for the young upcoming cricketers!

The footwork of most of the batsmen are poor. Playing on the front foot is a difficult art — first the science has to be learnt. Going back on the back foot is a natural defensive reaction. Offensive batting (when required) has to be planned, learnt, and practised (without getting caught). There is the story about Peter May, the former English stroke player, who practised the cover drive at the net for hundreds of hours, even after selection in the England national team. It is too early in the history of Bangladesh cricket to have dedicated cricketers which lead to specialisation. There is no short cut to success (in any profession). The play must be of professional standard.

— We lack bowlers who have penetration, hostility and guile (slow, medium or fast); apart from mere direction and length. We have to scout for a couple of genuine fast bowlers, who could be groomed over the years.

— How good is the Talent-hunting Network (not individuals, but network)? Cricket in Chittagong suffered during the construction of the stadium. Is there any official project to develop the sports goods industry?

— The bowlers must be innovative in the field, and be able to change tactics as and when required, depending on the strategy of the moment. Deception during the flight of the ball has to be cultivated. What happens after the ball pitches must also be fine-controlled. Variations in bowling technique take years.

— All bowlers must be able to bowl to the field set, or change field; otherwise should not expect to be selected in the national team.

— Few fielders throw the ball under-arm to the wicket keeper (short to medium distances), in a flat trajectory (for faster trip time — sling action); to ensure higher run-outs. However, it is encouraging to find that our boys are learning to dive to stop the speeding ball. An appeal to the ground staff: please ensure that small pebbles and hard particles are removed so that our sonar maati won't hurt our golden boys. Another good point: the standard and upkeep of our cricket pitches have been praised by the visiting teams. The trade secrets have to be learned practically (on-the-job training).

— There is a long-term project: re-leveling of the ground (Dhaka stadium) for the quick drainage of rain waters. Nowadays cricket is played round the year; hence a gap of a few weeks is necessary for this ground-sloping project. The ground will dry quicker, and the usability factor will increase.

— The TV commentators have to note that a certain percentage of the viewers are changing (coming and going) all the time, so recapitulations have to be announced at more frequent intervals. Another nuisance is that the advertisers want to seize every second of time for the commercials, leaving less time for display of data and statistics at reasonable intervals (strengthen the data base). Several grades of cameras are used, affecting quality control. The new OB van is an asset, but the learning curve is not short. For wireless transmissions of the signals, it is hoped that the frequencies used are suitable for tropical countries.

To the Editor...

Hartal — the root cause

Sir, It takes two palms to clap. The other palm may belong to somebody else. The criticism is focussed wholly on those who call for political hartals. The background of culture of hartal which has developed in Bangladesh since the beginning of 1990 has to be kept in view before appropriating the proportionate blame on one or more groups.

Hartal is a tool, not solution; a means to an end, not the end to a means. Hartal is a medium (container), not the message (content). Today's hartals are coercive, hence the opposition by those who are forced to observe it.

Observance must be voluntary, if freedom is to have any meaning for anybody. Awami League cannot claim to deny all responsibility for encouraging hartals, which it practised for a total of 174 occasions when it was in the opposition and BNP was in power, to pull down the elected government. Now similar is the case, only the positions of the parties are interchanged.

The second point is to communicate in a language which the opponent will understand and take seriously. AL takes note of only the hartal language and mobilises negatively against, using police force. Political issues cannot be solved through use of violence; which means war at the highest level, and agitation in various forms at the lower, internal, local levels.

It is unthinkable that the party workers are not allowed to enter their own party office (as also pointed out in the DS editorial) if the same treatment were accorded to the Awami League party workers, how they would react in the name of democracy? What applies to BNP, also applies to Awami League, as defined by justice and fair play (my ruling applies on me also). The AL has kept up a dubious propaganda of bringing back the voters' right, whatever it means. As a voter I do not see the point under stress.

The third point is that now AL is in power, hence the responsibility of judicious governance is theirs. The political leaders, under pressure from the leaders in other sectors of the society, must sit down together and find alternative solutions to this hartal syndrome; otherwise the country will suffer, regardless of noisy appeals. One of the other alternatives is military takeover. Who want it? It should NOT be encouraged, specially by the politicians, at the point of no-return (takeover by default).

The politicians may improve their image, if they love the country, which is doubtful, as it is a secondary priority in their subjective plans of action, as watched by the voters for the society. The majority of the voters may be wrong, but they decide the voting pattern, not those running as candidates. The exploited citizens should not be antagonised (the Commonwealth team to Pakistan had some surprises compared to the patronising assessment sitting overseas).

A Diehard Cynic Dhaka

Political reforms

Sir, The press has warmed-up scanning the judiciary issues being discussed publicly, after the Pandora's Box was opened, perhaps inadvertently, by the Prime Minister, and other ministers. It appears that the ruling party has pressed the wrong button in going about trying to improve the judiciary. The Prince of Denmark is missing; tackling firmly the long-standing issue of the separation of the judiciary from direct and indirect bureaucracy, and making it transparently independent, it should be; and, the insulation of the bureaucracy from the indirect, backdoor, unwarranted political influence.

The responsibility for affecting the urgent reforms lies with the elected representatives of the people; but they are unable

to deliver, regime after regime. The bone is struck in the throat, and no surgery or surgery is able to remove it. Others should not be blamed for the non-transparent inability to carry out one's own responsibility. The feigned helplessness has to be formally recorded for fixation of public responsibility.

The general elections is round the corner, hence no hard-core issues would be taken up during the intervening period. The dust is being raised.

AZ Dhaka

Politics

Sir, The national spirit is symbolised by the shape of a ball (imagine a ball), the view or perspective from any angle by any observer is the same (the property of a sphere). If this spirit develops into a split personality, the shape may change to that of a coin, which has two flat sides, and a thin circular edge. When squeezed, the sphere becomes flat as a coin, and the two sides represent the split personalities (only one side can be seen at a time), and the national view is restricted to the thin edge. Is this the way to look at a nation shaped like a coin?

Perhaps it reminds us of Bangladesh, where this political bipolarity has split the nation into two major segments, which do not disappear even in foreign countries, even when receptions are held in honour of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh by the Bangladeshis residing abroad. It is indeed very sad that the dividing wedge has penetrated so deep, that we never seem to be able to present a united front on national occasions. Only the combined political leadership can solve this problem, because the split started in the political sector; and later diffused into other segments of the society. We Bengalees have a mysterious passion for politics; hence the diverging sensibilities are difficult to overcome. So far the different political leaderships have showed no inclination to initiate dialogues on this sensitive issue of split national personality, and the

confrontation between the two major political parties are getting wider and more bitter, thereby more entrenched. The current situation is foreboding and depressive.

We have of course one flag, and the homogeneity in culture and language, in a compact country, but this split continues, even after a decade, to the return of democracy. All of us realise the absurdity of the stance, but the leaders of the society are not in a persuasive mood, and nobody is apparently doing anything about it. How long this internal cold war will continue? It is good for the budding nation?

The issue hopefully has not the permanency of hounding the two generations for long during the millennium. In national interest this unrealistic state of affair has to be nipped in the bud. But how? This citizen is expressing his dismay from the common denominator level, and appeals for a consensus on national issues. We just cannot live with a split national personality — it is not in national interest.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

"Medicins sans Frontieres"

Sir, I heartily congratulate the "Medicins Sans Frontieres" (Doctors without Borders) for winning the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its 'pioneering humanitarian work in several continents'. The "Medicins Sans Frontieres" which has been working since 1971 with a group of idealistic and dedicated French doctors have done a lot towards ensuring welfare of the distressed irrespective of caste and creed. It is sincerely expected that the Medicins Sans Frontieres would continue their welfare-oriented activities and expand their humanitarian services to every nook and corner of the globe. M Zahidul Haque BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Dhaka