

The Daily Star

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Probe into Jatrabari Incident: Two Questions

The government has formed a three-member probe body to look into the incident at Jatrabari during the hartal of November 8 in which three BNP leaders, including two MPs, were injured. The investigation has been initiated at the behest of the Home Minister himself. We welcome this development and hope that truth will come out and appropriate actions will be taken on the basis of it.

We have two questions regarding this. First, how neutral is the probe, headed by a DIG, likely to be when his big boss, the minister himself, on the floor of the parliament, has expressed grave doubts about the authenticity of the injury claim? If the investigation reveals that the claim of the opposition politicians is correct then the Home Minister will look rather foolish having already suggested that the incident was stage managed. Now, is it credible that a DIG will write a report which will contradict the Home Minister's publicly-proclaimed position? He must either be suicidal or have written off his career, if he does so. If the minister was genuinely interested in the truth then he should have waited for the probe body to finish its work before making public his views. In other words the probe body can already be said to have lost its credibility courtesy the minister himself.

The second question is, does the minister really want us to believe that Khoka was carrying a bag of blood on his person and waiting to jump in the line of a passing bullet to injure himself so that he could take out from his pocket the bag of blood and pour it over his head — and all this for some media coverage? Didn't Khoka run the risk of receiving the pellets in his eyes which would have blinded him or even killed him, as was the case of the unfortunate housewife?

On the other hand, he could easily have been spotted by thousands of onlookers and, especially, the press photographers — and there are many pro-government ones as anti-government ones — virtually destroying his credibility as a politician.

The point we would like to make here is that **ministers rightly enjoy a very high status in our society, as they do in every other. We must realise that once we adorn these high and exalted positions we cannot behave or say things we have been used to as opposition politicians. A lot of weight goes behind the public position of a minister. Their statements are records of history. Therefore, we humbly urge that our ministers become far more circumspect about what they say in public.**

Please don't destroy the value of words.

Friday Mailbox

Who's punishing whom?

Sir, Even after 42-hour hartal, the opposition was still not satisfied. They called another dawn-to-dusk hartal protesting the government attack on their party leaders. By attacking the opposition, the government has no doubt shown its deplorable side. But by declaring another hartal, the opposition has punished the people and not the government.

Don't our so-called people-friendly politicians realise that their programmes and protest affect only the people and not their opponents? How long the people of this country will continue to be the scapegoats of politics?

And as for the government, before giving order to attack the opposition with vengeance, just pause for a moment to recall that you too were once the opposition and you have been elected to power for five years — not forever.

Serina Sara
Banani, Dhaka.

Better late than never

Sir, At last the government has decided to give consent to people's view and build the NAM conference centre at Chandrima Udyan instead of Osmany Udyan. I sincerely congratulate the government. They have established that the government does often, if not always, care about the people who have elected them to power.

Well, it's never too late to take a right decision.

Abdur Rahman.
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Sir, We appreciate that the government has finally decided to let the 11,000 trees of this polluted city of Dhaka to survive and build the NAM summit centre at Chandrima Udyan. Even though many of us don't understand the justification of holding the NAM conference, as it has lost much of its importance now, but we still congratulate the government for not to fell the trees.

With thanks, I have only one thing to say to the government — better late than never.

Sharif Rahman.
House#34, Road# 21
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

The Shaheed Minar

Sir, I have read the comment made about the contribution of Novara Ahmed regarding the Central Shaheed Minar with mixed reaction. Those who know about late Hamidur Rahman will all feel disturbed and shocked about the move taken by some persons to glorify Novara Ahmed for a job which she did not do (The DS, 24th October). The Shaheed Minar embodies the sentiment of the historic Language Movement and the glorious Liberation War.

Such an attempt to magnify the performance of otherwise an illustrious sculptress may not also do justice to her reputation and attainment. For many years, she was in almost oblivion and it was a noble effort from some good people to bring her back. And the generous move of our Prime Minister, during her stay in Paris, to ask her to come back to Bangladesh to receive Ekushey Padak would be impeded to a great extent. It is also apprehended, if such controversy is allowed to continue, it will also not bring any benefit to Novara Ahmed.

I fully agree with the letter written by Jahannara Hussain published on October 27th, 1999. I had an occasion to know Hamidur

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Bofors: The Kickbacks Story

I wish Rajiv Gandhi had resigned when the accusing finger was directed at him. Had he owned the moral responsibility for what had gone wrong with the Bofors gun deal, he might have done better at the polls in 1989 because the people are generally willing to forgive a person who tenders an apology. He lost because he did not turn out to be Mr Clean.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

any evidence. I do not have to go over the events of more than a decade to show how nervous the Congress has been whenever the question of Bofors gun has cropped up. Congress foreign minister Madhavsinh Solanki's written request to the Swedish government to delay the release of names on the deal is too recent to be forgotten.

Rajiv Gandhi's involvement cannot be wished away. When the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) tried to whitewash the deal, there was one DMK MP, Alladi Aruna from Tamil Nadu, to point the accusing finger at Rajiv Gandhi. In his dissenting note, Aruna quoted chapter and verse to prove Rajiv Gandhi's complicity and questioned the various conflicting statements made by some former Prime Ministers.

The Congress has to answer many questions: Who introduced Quattrocchi, an Italian businessman working in Delhi, to Bofors? Where, when and why? His had a hush-hush contact with Bofors. What

job did he do for Bofors between November 1985 when the contract was signed and March 1986 when it was terminated? The answer is clear. He got the deal swung in favour of Bofors and that too in a record time. He could not have done this without Rajiv Gandhi's support.

I think the credit of bringing the case of the Bofors gun deal kickbacks into the open should go to the young, intrepid woman journalist, Chitra Subramanyam. She did not give up even when threatened. The first time I met her at Geneva nearly 10 years ago, she told me how she was warned on the telephone and through messengers that she would be killed if she did not give up pursuing the case.

"Aren't you afraid?" I asked her. She said she was worried. But they knew that I have an assurance from Deep Throat (who gave her information) that he will release to the press all information and documents on Bofors if they tried to harm me." The CBI, particularly MD Sharma and K Madhavan, who registered the FIR in January, 1990, did a satisfactory job. Still the agency has been on and off the inquiry, depending on who headed the government at the Centre.

The credit should also be given to BM Oza, India's ambassador to Sweden at that time. The CBI he said: "With the revelation of the evidence that Quattrocchi received commissions from Bofors, I have no doubt in

my mind that they were actually the bribe money for Rajiv Gandhi paid by Bofors through Quattrocchi. He was merely a conduit for siphoning money."

I have gone through reams of material. I have not yet found why Rajiv Gandhi telephoned Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson on April 27, 1987, and requested him to terminate the official probe which the government of India had earlier requested in view of the uproar in the country. Again, why did Rajiv Gandhi call off the visit of Bofors officials in July 1987? He had definitely something to hide when he refused to support Lars Ringberg's investigation in Sweden.

It is apparent that everything relating to the deal in its last stages took place in the Prime Minister's Office, with Rajiv Gandhi creating two channels: one, official and the other, known only to him and his office. Arun Singh, then the Minister of State for Defence, was probably right in saying that the government specifi-

cally told Bofors that there should not be any middlemen and that the condition was accepted by the company. His reference was to the government channel. He was not aware of the second channel.

General Sundarji, after retirement, admitted that he was told by SK Bhatnagar, then defence secretary, to change the note in which he had asked the government to threaten cancellation of the contract to force Bofors disclose the names of those who received the kickbacks. Significantly, Bhatnagar was appointed by the Rajiv Gandhi government as the Sikkim governor.

I wish Rajiv Gandhi had resigned when the accusing finger was directed at him. Had he owned the moral responsibility for what had gone wrong with the Bofors gun deal, he might have done better at the polls in 1989 because the people are generally willing to forgive a person who tenders an apology. He lost because he did not turn out to be Mr Clean. One day the full story will come out, as it did in 1977 after the emergency when many skeletons in government cupboard were brought out by the Shah Commission. What will then happen to the Congress or those who are not allowing the truth to come out is not difficult to guess.

OSLO MEETING

Last Leg of Journey of Peace by Israelis and Palestinians

by Harun ur Rashid

Oslo meeting has revitalised further the peace process and the world will watch how the two sides conduct themselves in the peace negotiations.

host the last stretch of negotiations in January or early February if he felt enough progress had been made to guarantee success. President Clinton wants to see a final peace agreement prior to the expiry of his term by 2000. The US administration has been geared up to assist both sides and US mediator Dennis Ross would fly to the region twice a month and US Secretary of State Madam Albright would make one, possibly two before February to monitor the peace process.

The frame-work talks began on 8th November for four days in the West Bank town of Ramallah. The teams are headed by the Palestinian Information Minister Abed Rabbo and Israeli diplomat Oded Eran.

Nuts and Bolts of the Issues Involved

Palestine Statehood has now more or less been accepted by the Israeli people. If the Israeli people has the right to an independent state how can they deny the same right to the Palestinians? This has been a great change in the minds of the Israeli people. The Palestine Statehood is in accordance with the 1948 resolution of the UN Security Council and Chairman Arafat postponed the declaration last May to the deference of the wishes of the US and European Union.

Now the question is, what will be the borders of the Palestinian state? Sixty per cent of the West Bank is now under complete control of Israelis and the Palestinian leaders wish to delineate the border on detailed maps with the Israelis, otherwise mere acceptance of the Palestine State without defined borders has no meaning to the Palestinians.

The Palestinian State needs to be geographically contiguous and economically viable and as such it must constitute, according to the Palestinian leaders, the lands prior to 1967 war.

Some of the forty per cent lands given to Palestinians in the West Bank are islands in a sea of Israeli-occupied lands and to get from one Palestinian territory to the next often requires passage through Israeli checkpoints. Unless the Israeli authorities agree to withdraw some of the settlements, the meaningful creation of a contiguous land mass of the Palestinian State appears to be impossible. It would be a moth-eaten Palestinian State.

Given the situation in the West Bank, the delineation of the final borders of the Palestinian State will invariably involve the Jewish settlements authorised by Israel in the West Bank for the last 32 years and to accommodate the Palestinian wishes, some of the Jewish settlements have to be dismantled to the anger of Jewish settlers. This will imply that there will be Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the Palestinians will have to accept this fact. Therefore a difficult 'give and take' will be involved for both sides.

Another emotive issue is the status of the city of Jerusalem. The old city of Jerusalem (eastern Jerusalem) is divided into Arab, Jewish and Christian and Greek Orthodox sections. The Palestinians want their capital of the state to be located in the eastern Jerusalem, while the Israelis are opposed vehemently to surrender a part of Jerusalem to the Palestinians. Prior to 1967, the old city was governed by Jordan and the Israelis occupied it after the 1967 war. It is a prize land for

the Jewish people as their holiest Solomon temple (only one part of the wall of the temple exists) is located in this part of the city. A compromise is required to resolve this sensitive and highly emotionally charged matter of partition of Jerusalem. (In 1947, Calcutta city, the capital of united Bengal, was proposed to be divided between West Bengal and erstwhile East Pakistan but the Boundary Commission did not agree.)

Another sensitive and humanitarian issue is the fate of the forgotten 750,000 Palestinians displaced from their homes during and shortly after the creation of the State of Israel. About 650,000 registered Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon. Lebanon has been unwilling to offer any rights or facilities to its Palestine refugees. Many refugees live in Syria and Jordan. They wish to return to their original lands in Israel.

Mr Barak said earlier that the Palestinian refugees of 1948 after the creation of Israel would not be allowed to return to Israel. This delicate issue of permanent status of the refugees is to be determined by Israel and the Palestinians. Lebanon insists that to be a party to any discussions over the future of the refugees as Lebanon is said to fear being presented with a fait accompli for the resettlement of Palestinian refugees inside Lebanon, which may upset the country's sectarian balance between the Muslims — Shia and Sunni — and the Christians. (Most of the Palestinian refugees are Sunni Muslims).

Water is a quarrel as old as the stony Biblical hills, and the water rights between Israelis and the Palestinians is another

difficult issue to be resolved. Of all the points of Israeli-Palestinian friction, few are as entwined in Palestinians' daily routine as the water shortage. Israel controls 80 per cent in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Gaza buys about five billion litres of water from Israel. Because of overpumping, groundwater in the Gaza Strip is dropping to 20cm a year and salt-water intrusion now extends several kilometres inland from the Mediterranean Sea. In some areas, according to health officials, Gaza's drinking water supply has 10 times the sodium content considered safe, leading to problems like kidney ailments and hypertension.

Israel provides each Palestinian in the West Bank only with 10 litres of water daily, and the requirement is one-fifth of the minimum under international standard. Palestinian officials say that apart from daily hardship, the shortage has worrisome long effects on their health and agriculture. Israel, on the other hand, blames the Palestinians because they have not quickly rehabilitated the decrepit water system in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians say that they are moving as fast as possible to correct the effects of three decades of neglect of pipes and pumping stations during the Israeli occupation.

To ease the water shortage problems, there are a few projects which need to be jointly co-ordinated by both sides, besides the equitable distribution and control of aquifers in West Bank and Gaza.

Conclusion

Some of the issues are no doubt regional time-bombs and no one has any real idea how to defuse them. That was why in Oslo both Israelis and Palestinians agreed to avoid public comments or actions which will cause enormous difficulty for the other side. Oslo having revitalised further the peace process and the world will watch how the two sides conduct themselves in the peace negotiations.

The author, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Semiotics of Politics

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

Is there a guiding principle in our politics now besides what is common sense: the government wants to remain in power and the opposition wants to return to it? And that meanwhile, the two leaders want to settle some of their old scores?

the opposition.

A political society exists, according to Aristotle, for noble actions and it must be aimed at the highest good of the highest kind of community, which is the state. Aristotle further expounded that families were built on the two fundamental relations of man and woman, master and slave, and that several families combined made a village as several villages combined made a state. In that sense, politics in twenty-eight years of our independence has backtracked to where it started: it has gone back to the families.

The state is no more than an agency that negotiates dynastic feuds. Hear out the leaders of the government and the opposition carefully to know that their mutual hatreds run deeper than political rivalry. The PM's harangue at the parliament last Tuesday, which was spiked with unsavory innuendoes directed at the leader of the opposition, may be treated as the latest evidence.

And you must never underestimate the power of hatred in politics! Aristotle tells us the story of Euripides who was accused of halitosis by Demianichus in the court of Archelaus, King of Macedonia. The king sympathised with an enraged Euripides, and allowed him to scourge Demianichus, after his rudeness. Decannichus, after

waiting many years, joined in a successful plot to kill the king; but Euripides had died by then. Thus the bad blood, which started over bad breath, ended in bloodbath and toppled a king from the throne!

The upshot of the story is that politics being the art or science of exercising or seeking power in the government or public affairs of the state is often sullied by the silly intentions of the politicians. Machiavelli, the great master of political maneuvering, cautioned in *Prince* that in the absence of guiding principle, politics becomes a naked struggle for power. Is there a guiding principle in our politics now besides what is common sense: the government wants to remain in power and the opposition wants to return to it? And that meanwhile, the two leaders want to settle some of their old scores?

The tragedy is that the naked struggle for power is diffusing itself into many more families, engaging them in their own bitter feuds. An aspiring youth got killed in old Dhaka in alleged rivalry with his own maternal uncle. In Faridpur, another maternal uncle was offended when his nephew had eloped with his daughter. The trait man not only pummeled his nephew to death but also mangled his male member with bricks in an uncontrollable rage. In election

times the struggle for power becomes even more naked when close relatives contest each other from the same constituency.

Which means if the families once consecrated the state, the state now desecrates the families. The state, which was created to uphold the family values as an institutions, now trickles its nihilistic values down to the families. Sadly though that reversal is taking place through politics as public leaders, pushing private agenda, have tarnished its glory. In 1939, Chairman Mao Tse-tung of China said in reversible trenchant phrase, "Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed." That is what politics was meant to be at least in a democracy, a bloodless way of sorting out differences amongst the people of discordant proclivities. Why would a former speaker need the blessings of a goon to do that? Why should a former head of the state, the highest officeholder of the highest community, during his visit, endearingly inquire whereabouts of the scum of a city? But why should politicians need fighting cadres and an attitude to diminish the opponent? Intransigence is when someone refuses to compromise, and arrogance is when one refuses to negotiate. Politicians need resolve in their character, not rigidity in their comportment.

To ask you the last science question of the day, how many of you have heard about the Brownian motion? It is the random motion of small colloidal particles suspended in a liquid or gas medium, caused by the collision of the medium's molecules with the particles. The collisions in our collusive politics have created a void where colloidal particles of our angst and despair are showing their random movements. The state has jarred loose the families and the families are jarring loose the individuals. In this helter-skelter, to further dissect the Athenian example, we might get drawn more into politics while the power goes elsewhere.

The author is a banker.