

Monopolistic Impulse

WHEN would our political leaders and activists wake up to the fact that the martyred intellectuals are above party politics and everyone has the right to pay their tribute to the immortal souls? When would they stop putting the supreme sacrifices made by millions for the nation's independence in partisan perspective? When would the people in power realise that they don't have exclusive rights to the observance of national events such as the Martyred Intellectuals' Day? Perhaps, never; and never will they cease to let their arrogance and possessiveness mar the sombreness of these events.

By chasing the Jatiya Party leaders and impeding passage of the 11-party Left Democratic Alliance to the premises of the Martyred Intellectuals' Mausoleum at Mirpur, the BCL activists displayed their inherent disregard for others' right. Who gave them the right to decide who has the right to pay tribute to the martyred intellectuals and who doesn't? What they did was sheer vandalism having little to do with the JP's discredited autocratic legacy. In fact, JP, as a party in the recently-formed opposition alliance, has only invited the wrath of the ruling party and its front organisations. The attack on its leaders could well be a retributive measure. Put in that perspective, the BCL action speaks of politics being stretched too far. The ruling party presidium should take the incident at the memorial on December 14 seriously, find out the perpetrators and punish them.

This was not the only instance of overplayed partisan consideration on the Martyred Intellectuals' Day. At the inauguration of the Martyred Intellectuals' Mausoleum at Rayerbazar, organisers' enthusiasm caused an affront to the families of the martyrs who were seated in the back rows. Even worse, there was no mention of Projonmo Ekattur (Generation 71), organisation of the sons and daughters of the martyred intellectuals. On the whole, it was an organisational debacle.

That we have had a marred observance of the Martyred Intellectuals' Day this year boils down to the fact that our politicians have not yet learned to differentiate between national and party functions. It is unfortunate, isn't it?

Easier Said than Done

THE home minister had been very emphatic in a recent speech about his determination to take the sternest of actions against the terrorist even if he was his son. But when it came to Aga Shamim, a notorious member of Chhatra League cadre and his lieutenant Sujon, caught by the police at Nagar Bhaban for alleged armed assault on Sunday in a tender submission-related incident, the administration played a different role. The police had to release the terrorists under pressure from 'influential quarters.'

Shamim and his group fought a running battle with a 'five star' gang at the Nagar Bhaban last Sunday in which 'Tokai Mizan' of Shamim group was injured and later on arrested by the police. Shamim and Sujon were again seen at the Nagar Bhaban Tuesday that gave the creeps to the workers of DCC and it was also alleged that both these terrorists met the Mayor at his office. But strangely the Mayor was reported to have justified meeting with the terrorists, disclaiming at the same time his acquaintance with Sujon. His assertion that the police should arrest terrorists whoever they might be and even if one belonged to the Mayor's party one should not be spared, fell flat because in the same breath he decried the nabbing of culprits from his office. He wanted them to be arrested from any other place. His reasons for such a stand sound childish. If people like the Mayor of the capital city of an independent country can think and behave in a manner that Mohammad Hanif has, then we can draw only one conclusion which is that they are patronising terrorists. This attitude is likely to prove self-destructive in the long run as has been seen in the past and will not, in any way, help the party in power. On the contrary this will bring disrepute to the powers that be.

Do Something, DCC

TWO more deaths have resulted from cerebral malaria in the capital. This is very tragic, more so, because this hints at the presence of the virus in country. It is now quite apparent that the disease was not imported.

The best way out is to contain mosquito infestation. The responsibility to take the steps urgently rests on Dhaka City Corporation. However, over the past years the DCC-promised mosquito-free environment has been a total illusion. De-contaminating the breeding grounds of mosquitoes like drains, stagnant water bodies etc., may be a laborious job but is not undoable altogether. At this point, we cannot help but mention the DCC's rather shady inadequacy in buying equipment for mosquito elimination. There are reports of procuring wrong kinds. This is one problem about which the ordinary people cannot do much except to wait for the LGED ministry's intervention; but they can, of course, keep their own premises clean.

But if the DCC had done its job and managed to contain the mosquitoes as promised by it so many times before then we would be spared the predicament we face today. Actually, the DCC should have foreseen something like this. Cerebral malaria was detected in the South East Asian region way back in 1996. Soon after, India was affected. Preventive measures should have started then, instead of waiting for it to come and catch us unawares.

THE Helsinki Summit of the powerful 15-nation European Union (EU) has decided to include Turkey among the prospective candidates, which will become members of this organisation. This is a major development and deserves careful consideration.

Turkey has been trying to join this European body almost since its inception in the early fifties and decided to apply for membership as far back as 1963. As a matter of fact it is possible to go back a few centuries and if we analyse the march of the Ottoman Empire spanning nearly seven centuries going up to the end of the First World War, we observe that the Ottoman move was from East to West. At the time of Emperor Suleyman the Magnificent in the 16th century Turkey was laying siege at the gates of Vienna. The memory of the 'terrible Turk' has not quite effaced from the memory of the Europeans.

From 1963 till the early nineties EU has taken great strides forward and from a six-nation organisation, Turkey has followed with single-mindedness the target of joining the EU and in the early nineties joined the Customs Union, thereby opening her gates to the entry of European goods. This turned out to be a one way traffic and Turkey carried a big burden. Even this step did not bring Turkey anywhere near her goal of joining the EU. Indeed she received a severe rebuff at the Luxembourg Summit two years ago. Turkey, darkly threatened to sever her links with EU.

Yet Turkey persevered. This long period of negotiation had

established the fact that there was lack of political will to receive Turkey as a member of an organisation, which was essentially Christian. There was of course the Greek factor. There is centuries old animosity between these two neighbours going back to 1453 when the Ottoman ruler Fatih Sultan Mehmet defeated the Byzantine Emperor Constantine and conquered Istanbul.

The hostility between Turkey and Greece now centres around two principal questions - Cyprus and the Aegean Sea. Cyprus was effectively partitioned in 1974 when Turkey landed an expeditionary force in the north of Cyprus in order to defend her compatriots and established a new state called Turkish Northern Cyprus. This has been a bone of contention for long. Numerous islands litter the coast of Turkey and Greece and there is often military stand-off. Greece has been trying for long to wrest concessions from Turkey.

The Cyprus question had gone into deep freeze until very recently President Bill Clinton of the USA during his recent unprecedented five-day visit to Turkey managed to bring the leaders of the two sides of Cyprus to the bargaining table. Negotiations have started under the auspices of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Greeks have been insisting upon Turkish agreement to refer the Aegean Sea dispute to arbitration at the International

Turkey in Europe

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Court of Justice at the Hague. Turkey has given the vague undertaking of considering the Greek proposal, Greece like any other EU member has a veto over blocking Turkey's entry into EU. Since the other major players within the EU were not enthusiastic about the Turkish presence they found it convenient to hide behind the Greek shield.

The devastating earthquake of 17 August 1999 which hit the vast area around the Marmara Sea of Turkey totally trans-

formed with each other with material help of every kind and most of all with a warm heart. There was flowering of feelings of brotherhood not seen in a long time. Cultural troops visited the two capitals and collected donations for the victims of the earthquake.

The Turkish earthquake was followed by one in Athens and the Turkish reaction was warm and spontaneous. These natural calamities laid the foundation of blossoming of relations and have surely played a role in

ceremonial photo session. What fate awaits Abdullah Ocalan, the terrorist leader on whom hangs a death sentence handed down by the highest court of Turkey? There are frequent demonstrations in capital Ankara by near members of families, who have lost their loved ones during the 15-year brutal war in the south-east of Turkey, which claimed 40,000 lives. The EU is very keen to see the life of Ocalan spared.

The silver lining lies in the fact that there are nearly 50 people, who have received death sentence and are waiting for 15 years. Bulent Cevit has pronounced categorically against death penalty. Death penalty has been abolished among the EU member states. The chances are that Abdullah Ocalan, who since his capture in Kenya has forsaken violence and has closed the chapter of violence in south-east Turkey, will see his conviction turned into life imprisonment. He has even pleaded through his lawyer for the entry of his country Turkey in EU. Indeed Turks of all stripes have joined hands for the entry of their country into this powerful organisation.

The entry of Turkey into EU is going to have far-reaching consequences. EU will cease to be a Christian club with the inclusion of the first Muslim state within its fold. The collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago has brought about the most

sweeping change in that region. President Clinton has rightly drawn attention of the EU member states that Turkey could be a bridge between Islam and Christianity. Furthermore with the emergence of the Turkic Republics on the periphery of Russia, EU can visualize its borders from the Atlantic to the walls of China. Thanks to the Turkic states Turkey has emerged from the periphery of Europe to the centre of a whole new world.

The joining of Turkey as a full member of the EU is going to bring about profound and far-reaching changes. Turkey with her 65 million dynamic population is going to be a heavy weight. From a modest beginning of collaboration between two enemies - France and Germany - of the early fifties EU has come a long way. EU has taken great strides in the economic, social and allied fields. There remains the hard question of political integration. How long that will take or if ever it will be achieved is anybody's guess. Sensing EU's rising strength President Clinton during his recent visit to Turkey stated that he would like to collaborate with Turkey within the EU.

By inviting Turkey within this fast growing organisation that is EU, the member states have decided on expansion of the organisation into uncharted fields. By joining the EU Turkey has pledged to honour the Copenhagen criteria to begin with. Turkey's internal politics cannot remain unaffected by this major development. As the millennium dawns the world continues to be ever more interesting.

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman



formed the picture. The earthquake killed nearly 40,000 people and turned into rubble whole cities along with industries. The Marmara Sea area is the industrial hub of Turkey and Golcuk, the naval headquarters. In a matter of seconds the entire naval headquarters sank into the Marmara Sea and nearly 400 naval officers including five star commanders were buried deep into the sea.

The earthquake produced a world wide reaction and nations rushed with help from countries as far as Japan and the USA. Nowhere the reaction was so spontaneous and moving as in neighbour Greece. Greeks

Greece refraining from erecting road blocks on the path of Turkey's entry into EU.

The inclusion of Turkey among prospective member states was accompanied by high drama. The bargaining went on till the last minute. Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Cevit had been invited to join in a lunch with member states and those waiting in the wings. Cevit wanted to be sure that the invitation was extended in due form without any preconditions attached. The EU has respected the Turkish wishes scrupulously and Cevit barely made it to the lunch table and stood with EU leaders for the

How Long America will Suffer from Iraq-phobia?

by AMM Shahabuddin

America is now devising a new democratic way rather than the so-far-followed 'autocratic means' to build up popular resistance against Saddam. Under the new scheme, America will provide military training to Saddam opponents, at a cost of \$99 millions 'to basically develop and support forces for democracy for a move to democracy within Iraq.'

UN Policy Criticised

The Iraqi government which has been insisting on immediate withdrawal of the 'sanctions', had already rejected the latest extension but hinted that it would resume oil export if the extension is given for six months. The Iraqi government had also reiterated that such periodic extensions do not offer anything towards the lifting of the sanctions or to improve the condition of the (Iraqi) people. However, an Iraqi daily Ath-Thawara, a mouth-piece of the ruling Baath Party, blasted the UN for its periodic extension of the so-called 'humanitarian programme', saying that further extension would be 'a new extension of the embargo', adding that America 'wants to maintain the sanctions to pursue its war of attrition against Iraq'. The paper further said that 'it is shameful that the UN is trying to camouflage US policy aimed at starving and humiliating Iraq.'

It is an open secret that America has been following a rather vindictive policy against Iraq since the Kuwait war which was undoubtedly a misadventure on the part of Saddam and had invited a fatal boomerang impact on the Iraqi people. But it is also a fact that America had used Iraq for a decade or so with an 'war of attrition' against Iraq, by supplying all sorts of necessary deadly weapons and war materials. But for some reason or other, Saddam turned a 'devil' in the eyes of America as has been the case with America's another most

trusted leader Noriega former President of Panama, who was literally 'kidnapped' by US Commando forces from Panama and subsequently put in prison on lofty charges of heroine smuggling! Saddam should thank his stars that he is still 'reigning' in Baghdad and not languishing in an American prison on some other charges!

Division of Iraq

The 'most unkindest cut of all' has been the division of a sovereign state - Iraq into three parts, by creating, not by any UN authorisation, but by sheer US whimsical 'fat', two 'no-fly' zones, 'one' in the north for the protection of the Kurds who want to have their own Kurdistan, and another in the south for the Shiites who were also encouraged by America to create troubles for Saddam, making the two zones 'out of bounds' punishable for the Iraqi trespassers. Thus only the central part of Iraq remained the de facto Iraqi state. So the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was practically hand-cuffed by America in his own territory. And hundreds of daily sorties of joint American-British air operation against Iraqi targets, killing and wounding innocent people, devastating private properties, had been carried out, and are still being done, to protect the 'holy sanctity' of the two American-made 'no-fly-zones' in the name of democracy and human rights. Whenever Iraq has tried to assert its sovereign authority in its own land in north and

south, illegally 'occupied' by the 'intruders' from a third country, it has got the hot stick. If this is not seen as aggression by the eyes of UN, then the UN better follow the policy of 'seeing, hearing and saying nothing'. That would be a more prestigious and philosophical posture on its part.

Iraq-Phobia!

Iraq has been trying to get out of the US-powered 'crushing machine' of sanctions to save its people from total strangulation. But America is adamant in its policy. What a dangerous game the only superpower is now playing in the name of teaching a lesson to a recalcitrant 'little Hitler'! The earlier America realises it, the better it would be for the world at large. History has its own way of doing things. It never lies, nor does it favour a 'super power' to remain 'super' ad infinitum. It runs its own course with new turns and twists. Look at history. It builds its own milestones at different points of 'yesterday', 'to-day' and 'tomorrow'. A century back, Britain, which was once a colonial power ruling America, was at the same position where America now stands. There is always a 'tomorrow' waiting in the isles of history to turn the 'wheel of Fortune'. The once mighty Soviet Union has practically been reduced to a nonentity, now 'kicking' as Russia. Remember that each bomb and missile that hits Iraq, killing

and destroying properties, strengthens Saddam's hands, making the ground more slippery for the 'intruders'. So far all their techniques and devices here totally failed to move Saddam an inch from his position. So how long America and some of its close allies, except perhaps three permanent Members of the UN Security Council - France, Russia and China - will suffer from Iraq-phobia? They seem to be desperate and now planning another desperate action to dislodge Saddam.

Military Training and Promotion of Democracy?

America is now devising a new democratic way rather than the so-far-followed 'autocratic means' to build up popular resistance against Saddam on the soil of Iraq itself. And what's the novel idea? The new American 'device', may be delicate, but surpasses previous ones and even makes a mockery of democracy. Under the new US scheme, America will provide military training to Saddam opponents, at a cost of \$99 millions 'to basically develop and support forces for democracy for a move to democracy within Iraq.' Some opposition leaders and activists, including former armed forces men (most probably who have secured 'political asylum' in America on humanitarian grounds), will participate in a training course for a limited period in an 'Air force facility in Florida', the purpose being to teach 'how to

organise a military in a state of emergency'.

Of course, it is not the first and only instance of America encouraging Saddam's opponent groups to bring down the Saddam regime in Baghdad, to install a pro-west government there. There have been overt and covert manoeuvrings in the past. Of them, the creation of 'no-fly zones' for Kurds in the north and for Shi'ites in the south to keep the pot boiling, are the glaring examples. But the latest scheme to provide 'military training' 'for a move to democracy in Iraq' is undoubtedly a rare specimen of fine diplomacy to dislodge a regime not liked by America. It is indeed a novel combination of democracy and militarism - a grand mix-up, perhaps developed in USA in a 'democratic cauldron' to serve as a new 'elixir' at 'trouble spots'. So what is wrong when a military ruler says he wants to develop democracy from grass-roots? They seem to have different facets in different situations. That's why they say: 'All cats are grey in dark.' A naked truth, indeed.

A Parenthesis Par Excellence

The daily Toronto Star (Canada), published a number of letters during the 1990-91 Gulf War and US involvement under President Bush to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. One of such letters, *inter alia*, said: 'We have killed 100,000 Iraqis. Countless others are sick, starving and homeless... Saddam Hussein is still free to brutalise and oppress. We are no closer to a permanent peace in the region... Where is the justice in the outcome? I'm afraid I find none.'

The writer is a retired UN official.

To the Editor...

Export of low quality frozen food

Sir, Every year Bangladesh earns huge foreign currency through exporting frozen food. But recently a group of unscrupulous businessmen has started exporting unhealthy frozen food, namely shrimps and fishes. They export inferior quality frozen food by making false and fake documents. This group has been using the name of renowned frozen food exporting firms. If such dishonest practices continue, the country will lose its market overseas, including European union market. If the government fail to resist these fake exporters, ultimately the genuine exporters will fall into great trouble. Therefore we urge the authorities concerned to take stern action against the dishonest exporters.

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

Arsenic contamination

Sir, According to some professional experts, as reported in a section of the local print media, one of the causes of increase in arsenic content in ground waters in Bangladesh is due to paucity of refilling of the water through the normal natural process. This shortage of refilling water is believed to be due to (a) the overdraw of huge quantity of water through the sinking of a large number of deep tube-wells over a recent period; and (b) construction of many embankment restricting the flow of water (flood control and development projects). The chemical outcome is that due to shortage of oxygen (in water), the arsenic in water cannot form natural sediment, and becomes harmful for drinking.

A Zahidul Haque BAI, Dhaka

These are highly technical and complex matters. The real situation may be discussed and analysed in forthcoming seminars, and more information may be released to the public through official sources dealing with the arsenic issue.

A Husnain Dhaka

Overhauling the postal service

Sir, According to a recent press report, the government is planning to overhaul the Postal Department with a view to improve its services. Although a little late, the government deserves appreciation for undertaking the above mentioned programme. It is sincerely expected that a safe and sound movement and delivery system of letters, particularly the ordinary letters will be devised so that not a single ordinary letter will be lost in the post but delivered to the receiver in time and in tact.

It may be mentioned that people are facing serious problems in receiving ordinary letters from home or abroad. Often we are embarrassed to ask a foreign friend or relative or a foreign institution to send a second, sometimes even a third copy of a letter or publication under registered post which we had never reached. Since there is no system of asking the post-office of the whereabouts of a missing ordinary letter or postal packet, both the sender and the receiver have to endure the suffering!

A Zahidul Haque BAI, Dhaka

Polarised lists

Sir, It is perturbing to read (DS, Dec 7) that a top leader of the Awami League, who is also the Home Minister, has asked the AL workers to submit their own version of suspect lists to

the police, of terrorists and other undesirable elements in the society for deterrent police action. Why other informers were not invited, to maintain impartiality? Why mix government with open politics? Who will point out the discrepancies inside the AL? This appears to be a one-sided approach.

It is the duty of the 'neutral' police agencies to compile such lists through neutral probes (a party to the dispute cannot sit over judgement). If one political party is encouraged to name names, then other or all political parties and other civic bodies or each and every individual should have been invited for lists, to be scrutinised later for screening and follow-up (an impossible task).

The other parties, agencies, organisations, and individuals have many names to suggest or suspect. This politicisation of police activity may be debated in public for allaying any mis-giving, misconception, or misunderstanding. If this system is introduced by the regime, then the government's following might follow the same style of operation, disturbing the peace in the society, and many innocent citizens would be harassed. What has happened to the government intelligence agencies? Polarized?

There is a correct procedure of doing things officially and formally. Governance and politics should not be mixed. It is dangerous, under the charged political situation obtaining in the country at present, why make the situation more explosive, through amateurish and subjective procedures? Transparency in proceedings must be maintained. The public opinion should not be ignored. The citizens wish to live in peace, but the way it is being handled is open to question. The citizens have the right to demand clarification on any public issue.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

OPINION

The Psychology of Political Hartals

Abul M Ahmad

While supporting in principle the need for non-partisan hartal campaign to rouse public opinion to wean away the political leadership from their autocratic somnolence, as depicted in the chain editorials in the DS, one late month did not touch upon a couple of points, which are necessary for better grasping of the new fashion in political grinding of principles and people.

The Psychology of hartal has to be examined in depth (publicly) by the experts in this field, but a couple of observations (below) by a layman might not be too irrelevant.

The editorial referred to a trifurcated fight, with the public opinion - and rights - delegated lower down the critical evaluation scale. There are more than five dimensions to this hartal-hostage malady.

First, there is this unabated belief in enforced hartals by the hosting parties, which include the two major warring political super-powers, fervently practising this mantra of tribalism as a 'woodoo' cult. Strangely enough, at the same time each party is denouncing the other with a cheek-in-the-tongue stance.

A negative cult has been inflamed by both which is in basic conflict with the universal concept of personal and public freedom. Others (outsiders) have the basic right to differ, silently or noisily (no violence involved). Suffrage may not be confused with sufficiency. The focus, first and foremost, is no party interest - losing is not accepted by the political players in this part of the world. The critics cannot simply focus solely on the current perpetrators of hartal; conventionally overlooking the master political godfathers who introduced this so-called 'democrat-

ic' way of protesting in the early '90s. It is not fair to believe in the motto: 'When you do it, you are wrong, when we do it, it is right'. It is a powerful stand, irrespective of propaganda reinforcement.

As pointed out earlier hartal is a tool, and not the end to a means. This tool became 'popular' due to political communication gap between the two major political parties. Dialogue is a means of basic tool of communication, but in the local political culture there is loss of faith and credibility in the political exchange of views; due to several rigid stands on both sides.

The main reason for this mental block is the idealistic aura of charisma on both sides, either of which is not acceptable by the other side. This stalemate originated soon after the combined mass movement in 1990, jointly led by these same two parties, who are today flying at one another's throat, holding innocent people as hostages.

Therefore the supposed rift or the artificial principled stand looks phony to many. Why these two leaders cannot cooperate and coordinate when the goal is common, which is the development of the society? It means compromising for the sake of the mass, servicing for the people, and bowing in to public interest. Both the parties can display accommodation to the country in complementary fashion, without muddying the waters for party ideology.

This display of intolerance by both the parties is a national misfortune, while noting that all the leaders in the country (political and non-political) are chary of putting their heads together to sublimate the collective wisdom to find a solution

to this cosmetic stand of face-saving by the two major parties.

The country's supreme leadership, at any point of time, is at fault (question: why there were no 200 days of hartal in the 1980s?). Statesmanship involves a rise above the current environment, to sink the stalemate. Surely we are not going to compete for decades (as in some other areas of conflict at the global level) to arrive at a settlement of internal dispute. The party ideologies can be compromised at the marginal level for the sake of the nation, when party and national interests coincide after convergence.

Like it or not, we have to believe in providing political space to the other players. From the popular level it appears that the problems are in the areas of technical detail. No, it is in the approach to the problem.

With the current rigid stand it would not be possible to solve the hartal issue during the tenure of the current regime, because the right time for a settlement has passed, as both the sides have burnt the bridges, and the next general election is not far away.

Elections and change of regimes will not make hartals disappear as if by magic. The political leadership is stuck with the hartal bone inside their throats. There must be some political agreement before the next general elections, with the electorate as the witness. Banning hartals is not a solution - there is bound to be blood-shedding.

Otherwise third forces may be generated to fill in the instability, as the public patience and suffering have reached the saturation point; more so, as the public are the suffering party, and not the active and willing participants of the duel between the two leaders.