# The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Thursday, January 20, 2000

# Right to Security

A High Court Division of the Supreme Court has Issued Rule Nisi upon the government, police administration and Dhaka University authorities on a writ filed by Advocate Salma Ali in a matter of grave public importance. The bestial outrage of the modesty of a woman and the gruesome murder of a joint secretary to the government on the DU campus had brought to bold relief a law enforcement pitfall in protecting the life and honour of ordinary citizens. The authorities concerned have to show cause now 'as to why they should not be directed to take steps according to law to eradicate anti-social and criminal activities and to improve the law and order situation in Dhaka city.' A special emphasis has been laid on the citizen's security, especially that of a woman, 'within the DU campus and its adjoining areas.

In specific terms, the court has directed the government and the police to take action against persons engaged to maintain law and order at the DU campus when those conscience-pricking incidents

took place on January 1 and 11.

We wholeheartedly welcome the pro-active role of the judiciary in matters touching up on the fundamental interests of citizenry. Advocate Salma Ali has our plaudits for invoking the writ jurisdiction in defence of the civic right to protection and the dignity of human person.

Coming to the corrective steps of the police after those two incidents we find that: (a) DMP Commissioner AKM Shamsuddin has since been replaced by Matiur Rahman, a former DIG of Dhaka Range; and (b) the new incumbent has dropped something of a bombshell by telling the press that policemen could now shoot a mugger, toll collector or a terrorist in hot pursuit if all attempts to overpower and catch him had failed.

We think bombshells or adhoc measures are not the things that are going to radically improve police performance. The law enforcement agencies will have to be placed on a solid footing with more funds allocated to them so that they are properly equipped and have the proper kind of training imparted to them to handle the situation effectively.

### Save the Royal Cats

LIOW cruel and exploitative man has been of the I wild life finds a poignant expression in the size of the current tiger population in the world which stands precariously reduced to 4,622 from roughly 100,000 at the beginning of the 20th century. These royal cats have been sacrificed at the altar of our greed for wealth; and 'aspiration' for better health and, shamefully, for enhanced sexual vigour. The revelations, made at the first general assembly of the Global Tiger Forum in the capital on Tuesday, certainly land a big blow to our collective conscience and the much bragged about superiority as human beings. Thankfully, there are groups of activists, like the Forum, who have been working for years with utmost dedication to protect and help the wildlife prosper. These are the people who can bring about an end to the cruelty on wild creatures and every conscious citizen of the world should rally around them, not only out of compassion for wild life but also out of selfinterest. For disturbance of our eco-system essentially endangers our own existence.

In Bangladesh, consciousness about environment and eco-system is still at a very nascent stage. Although we have actively participated in international conventions on environment and ecology, the ground reality is that we have not quite lived up to our responsibilities. As a result, environment degradation in the form of air and water pollution, deforestation and depletion of water body has continued at an alarming rate. To make matters worse, we have allowed poaching of wild beasts to continue. The Royal Bengal Tiger we used to, and perhaps still do, take pride in now have steadily decreased in number. Fortunately, we still have 362 of these majestic felines left in the Sunderbans. Let us renew our commitments to conservation of wild life and work for reversing the trend towards their extinction. Let us hope that in a few years' time, the reduction in tiger population will be completely stemmed.

## Break the Stalemate

RICKET has come to a standstill in spite of the MCC tour of Bangladesh. The situation has reached a point where the BCB and the CWAB (Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh) are turning away from each other leaving cricket on the edge of a precipice. This has been going on for some time now. In the absence of fruitful communication between the CWAB on one side and the BCB and the CCDM (Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis) on the other, the crisis is taking an enormous proportion. In its frenzy for putting the cart before the horse, the outfit called BCB, supposed to be charged with the responsibility of improving the game of cricket in this country, seems busy promoting international cricket somewhat at the expense of national cricket. All their energy, imagination and drive are directed to organising the kind of matches which are extremely profitable.

Cricket has always been a seasonal game in Bangladesh and it is only in recent years that we have seen it played for a longer time following the introduction of day/night matches and the season progressing into the months of May/June. So the BCB has the responsibility of drawing a timetable for the major cricketing events accordingly and this calls for transfer of players right at the beginning of the calendar. If in England they can complete all their seasonal cricket between April and September, including the tests, why can't this be done here with lesser number of teams and matches? There is no earthly reason why it cannot be achieved between October and May to avoid clashing time-tables. Then again the BCB must decide its priority as far as the tournaments and leagues are concerned. Once these are prioritised and logistics supplied for smoothly running the matches there should be no complaints from any quarters whatsoever. As it stands now the BCB must come forward to break the stalemate and put country's cricket on the right track.

# Let's be Democratic—Within and Without

by Maqsud Alam

OR the last twenty years our politicians are virtually A keeping the entire country hostage for their own selfish interests. They like to stay in power and get all the privileges the country has to provide the politicians. They never gave any thought as to how terrible their lives would have been had they not been where they are today. The situation remained unchanged irrespective of which political party is in power because once they get to the power they forget the fact that they took oath to serve the people rather than serving their self interests. Let us now identify what these problems are and suggest some solutions to each of these problems. We want to lead a nice and peaceful life which is our right as citizens of this country.

The major problem lies with the practice and understanding the concept of democracy. Let us first define the term "democracy" for which we have fought for centuries, say starting from the British colonial rule, and we are still far from achieving our goal of a truly stable democratic government of our own. According to the Webster's New World Dictionary, democracy is the government by the people, directly or through representatives. In other words, it is a form of government in which the people govern themselves or elect representatives to govern them, of course, with due respect for minorities and people from other

cultures! Keep in mind that dictatorship or any other form of authoritarian rule will lead any society backward because the human nature is driven by profit making incentives that society has to offer. Besides, human beings are not angels to lead a utopian society. But we can fix all of these with our

knowledge and wisdom. In our highly respected Parliament, the voting that takes place on various sensitive bills that are introduced in the House are called open ballot voting. This open ballot voting was designed by our past ex-military leaders so that their puppet MPs (Members of the Parliament) in the parliament could not change floor when voting on various bills take place there. As an important example, a noconfidence motion moved by the opposition party (after meeting all the necessary legal requirements) against the government will never succeed in

removing the present government from power until and unless the MPs from the ruling party also vote against their party leader. This is because it needs the majority vote of all the MPs in the House in order to be a success. All the major political parties in the country realize this major flaw in our parliamentarian proceedings but they never amend these dictatorial laws which were imposed by the ex-military rulers to consolidate their grip on power for eternity. In fact, if this law can be amended, then there would be no reason for opposition political parties to call

strikes (Hartals). The 30 additional seats in the parliament is making the democratic processes even worse so that any government can function on its own without the participation of the opposition party in the parliament just because the ruling party have the needed majority in the parliament. It is better to have a hung parliament rather than a parliament that advocates one party rule with the help of the 30 reserved seats for women.

ship effectively. This is very true from the political perspective of the subcontinent that when a political leader dies then one of his closest relatives becomes the leader of the party, then the question is - where is democracy? Why not we select out leaders by a democratic process within the party starting with the most prospective candidate for the position? The democratic institution within the party should be maintained at all times and only then a party can perform

well in a democratic parliament. Of course there will be some ups and downs but the objective should be to put the right person for the right job. Many of our political party leaders got their job because of their blood relation with their predecessors - a shame in the name of democracyl When a political party other than the one in power is elected then the party in power must

accept the defeat for that term

and it does not mean that the

self-esteem of the losing party

has gone down. It takes courage

and wisdom to accept the hon-

us! They exploited the situation to make the law for the president not to run for more than two terms while making sure that the prime minister can run for office as many time as he/she wants to!

It is my understanding that we should amend our laws further for the requirement of running for MPs. It should at least be a two-year Bachelors degree for males and H.S.C. (higher secondary level) for females since according to the government statistics, women in Bangladesh are academically behind their male counterparts in higher education. This is important so that our legislators will understand the concepts of each and every piece of the bills that are proposed in the parliament before they vote on any such bill. I have checked the government statistics on higher education and by now we have enough people of higher education to support our government

structure. The people of Bangladesh suffered enough from colonial rule for hundreds of year and now suffering from the mis-

generation take over the leadership role. I sincerely hope that in future we, the humble citizens of Bangladesh, will not fall victim to our leaders' mistakes.

The legal system including the law enforcing agencies like police force should be allowed to function independently without any party affiliation and be better paid with modern equipment and communication system. In fact the government can earn revenues by enacting fines on illegal activities, say, parking, encroachment and many other things so that part of these revenues can be funneled to improve the budget for the law-enforcing agencies. In fact these agencies would thus become self sufficient from the financial standpoint and at the same time can provide better services to the citizens

We, the people of Bangladesh are innocent victims of wars. injustice, anarchy, strike, and God knows what more lies. ahead. Majority of our people live below the poverty line and politicians are destroying the economy to make it worse. These politicians do not realize

They say history repeats itself and it is very true in case of Bangladesh even though our political parties are unwilling to accept this basic fact. If one party changes or improves the political situation the other fears that its grip on power would come to an end. But, such improvements not only strengthen the institution of democracy and leadership in the country but also all the parties get the most benefit. It does not hurt to do some good for the country but it does hurt to do something improper or unjust. Another important factor that our politicians and the valued government servants often forget is that a democratic government is there to serve the people, not to be served by the

Last but not the least, our politicians do not feed us two meals a day. The country still has to rely tremendously on foreign aid to run the government. And this affects everyone in Bangladesh because all the later generations will have to bear these foreign debts and repay with interest on these

Only if we could implement proper democracy on the floor of the parliament then the menace of strikes will disappear because then the pariament will decide what to do and what not to. To tell the truth. there are millions of people who do not care whether AL or BNP is in power. All we care is to earn our own living so that we can have two square meals a day and lead a peaceful life. What these political parties do not realize is that by crippling the economy of the country with a series of strikes they are making their chance of staying in power very slim. Because, later when they get to power they will not have enough money in the exchequer to run the country except to beg for further foreign loan the burden of which we all share as citizens of the country. But the fact is that nobody would feed us unless we help ourselves. So we want to stand up not with someone else's help but on our own strength

Today, the party in opposition is doing exactly what the party in power did while they were in opposition. Yet one hopes, we all can learn some lessons from our mistakes and correct these for our own benefit - after all we've one country to share with each other.

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Women in Bangladesh are not lagging behind in politics as one can see both our Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are female. Also, it is in the interest of all the political parties including the one in power that our leaders get rid of these 30 permanent reserved seats for them to succeed in major democratic issues like the no-confidence motion. Once a person becomes a

party leader he/she remains the leader even if his/her political actions are not right, if one analyses it from a neutral point. A person may be a great political leader at a certain point in life for a given situation but he/she may not remain so forever in discharging his/her duties. This is because it is a natural fact that no human being functions at the same potential throughout his/her lifetime so we must make the way clear for other people with more leadership skills. Let's not forget the fact that man is mortal and even though experience is important we must pave the way for the young people to take the leaderourable defeat. One can always try for the next election or a chance to call for the no-confidence motion against the government if it (the government) fails to achieve the objectives it promised the people. Once you have created the proper democratic atmosphere it should be the either one of the largest political parties to rule the coun-

As a matter of fact, the elected president in the United States, who is also the head of the government in that country, cannot run for more than two terms even if the same party is elected more than twice. Why cannot we do the same for our country? We also have a rule that the president cannot run for the office for more than two terms but the fact here is that the president in Bangladesh is not the head of the government. He is simply the head of the state with no administrative power when the prime minister is in the office. The prime minister is the head of the government in Bangladesh. So as it turns out, once again our own politicians are cheating with

takes of our selfish or incompetent political leaders. This is a country of approximately 125 million people and I am sure we have people with better leadership skills out there. Perhaps by some irresponsible laws, we are giving a bad name to democracy. It is my appeal to the leaders of our country, please do not let us suffer for your misdeeds and you political shortcomings. Democracy teaches us respect and tolerance. If our beloved politicians want to fight for the country's leadership then they can do it on the floor of the national parliament, which is also the symbol of democracy. And, that way we can all lead our lives peacefully. Of course, among other things we need some responsible and efficient

parliamentarians. Our leaders often give us the common lame excuse that our democracy is a baby and it needs more time. Well then, it is our leaders who need more knowledge on democracy and meaningful politics. If they do not know how to handle things they should step aside from politics and let our bright young

that individual economic improvement will enhance overall economy of the country. The political leaders do not understand how to run the economy Rather than dictating the economy of the country on their own, the political leaders may have better economic advisors. if they really want good for the country as well as for themselves, as citizens of the country. They should know that in fifty years time there will be no place to accommodate anymore people on the soil of Bangladesh if the current trend of population growth continued, not to mention we are the world's poorest country. And time is running out to prepare our country for a better future. To face these situation, the first thing that we ought to do is to educate our people and allow a thorough industrialization so that we can find alternative ways to tackle the situation. Places like Singapore and Hong Kong have more people per square kilometer than we do but they are highly industrialized with much higher per

# Teaching Old Politicians New Tricks isn't Easy

by A H Jaffor Ullah

The big unanswered question before us is - will it be possible to teach our old politicians new tricks? If the answer is affirmative then there is a hope for our destitute and impoverished nation.

can't teach an old dog new L tricks" is very appropriate and applicable to Bangladesh's old politicians. According to this old word of wisdom, one cannot teach old person anything new. Old habits, according another phrase, don't die easily. Bangladesh's politicians have been indoctrinated for the last quarter century to believe that hartal is a political weapon that should be used as frequently as possible to keep your adversary on his or her toes.

HE western adage - "You

Whether one realizes or not, most politicians in Bangladesh do not subscribe to the principles of democracy. In true democracy, the citizens will elect through adult suffrage a body of legislators who would consider it their onus to make new laws, amend old laws, and debate in the parliament various bills. They will also elect a leader to be the chief executive of the nation. In parliamentary system, that chief is known as Prime Minister (PM). The PM would put together a team of ministers to run the administration. For ease in administration, the PM normally appoints ministers from his or her party. The essence of democracy is - rule by the majority. If one particular party cannot obtain a majority, then

it can form coalition with likeminded legislators from another party. Once an administration is formed, then it is allowed to run the government for a fixed period. At the end of the term, a new election will be held to elect a new set of legislators. This cycle of election-governance-termination and a new election can run endlessly provided the citizens are happy with democracy. How difficult could it be to understand this fundamental concept? Perhaps in Bangladesh the

politicians have a vague idea how democracy functions. For example, if one party loses a fair election then they would quickly assert that they would not join the legislative body They fail to understand that their constituencies have elected them to represent them (constituents) in the parliament. The next thing, they would say that the present administration is acting more like a dictator and turning the country into a police state. The other salient feature of the opposition party would be to dis-

agree with the ruling party. So. it is quite immaterial whether the ruling party is trying to pass a good piece of legislation or has a good intention of starting a new programme in the country, the opposition would always oppose it vociferously ever and anon. Then, one day out of the blue you are going to hear the bombshell. The opposition would announce their "oust the government" movement. A relentless wave of hartal (strike) will then follow. Obviously some loss of life is expected in the showdown. The opposition would then capitalize on the senseless violence. More waves of hartals would follow. The

folly of the few. The big question before us at this time when we have entered a new millennium is — how could we teach our old politicians new tricks? One of the

end-result will be absolute law-

lessness and mayhem in the so-

ciety that will be coupled with

economic malaise and slow

down. Consequently, the com-

mon people will suffer for the

new tricks the civil society would love to teach them is how to abstain from calling those absurd hartals? Hartal kills the economic development of a nation. One would be hard pressed to find a country in this world that loved to stage hartal or similar activities. Common people in this day and age have already learned that strike, hartal, and other similar activities are real nuisance for any given society. The question is how long will it take for Bangalee politicians to learn this truth. Calling hartal is similar to stunt the growth of a nation. Only an enemy of a state could do such evil deeds. Therefore, it goes without saying that hartalloving politicians of Bangladesh are anything but friends of the Bangalee nation. Let us then paint a dismal prospect for those politicians of Bangladesh. First, it was Sheikh Hasina's party during early 1990s. And now the able has turned. Begum Khaleda Zia has learned her lessons rather well. She is out there to break

more time, and she will do it. While the opposition parties are gleefully announcing their action plan - how to unseat a democratically elected government - the civil society is stiff scared thinking the prospect of the violence in the main street The politicians have once again proved that they are the ultimate terrorists in the nation. When one of them was hit hard in the head a few months ago, the entire newspaper establishment in Bangladesh went agog with the news. The news paper tried to make the MP a real hero. The newspapers reporters should have asked one question - why did this MP was doing in the road? His constituencies elected him not to be on the road. He should 'ave been in the parliament enacting rules. The opposition MPs have some work cut out for them. Look at all the MPs in Great Britain! Look once more at the Member of Congress and Senators from the Republican Party who are faithfully attending all the legislative sessions in the U.S. Congress. They are doing

this although the Executive Branch is now under the Democratic Party. When will the MPs belonging to Bangladesh's opposition parties will learn that opposition MPs must play their ·role for the good governance of their country. In Bangladesh, it seems as if winning the executive branch is the most coveted prize of all. We aren't that naïve. We know the reason very well. The prize is not sans monetary gain. In the West, political games are being played differently. And that is the whole truth.

The big unanswered question before us is - will it be possible to teach our old politicians new tricks? If the answer is affirmative then there is a hope for our destitute and impoverished nation. If, however, the answer is negative then, what could the civil society do? Most certainly, the newspapers and other media pages could be filled with articles vilifying the politicians who favour hartals. A national campaign in that direction could very possibly put the nails on the coffin. The bigger question, however, is - will the intelligentsia go for this?

The writer, a senior research scientist in America, writes from New Orleans

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Strange maladies

Sir, Strange maladies have infected the society; hence it is necessary to coin new words to focus on the social impact. "Academitis" is the feeling in the academia circle that the hands can replace the brain when the difference of opinion cannot be tolerated ('You will earn your bread with your hands, and not through the sweat of the brow').

A section of the disgruntled and greedy society feel that the country needs an armament and rearmament phase, to flush out the honest and the meek, where quantity will prevail over quality, and dissent has to be muffled violently. The good has been muzzled by the evil, and the former is feeling helpless, regardless of the power and

authority of the government. The regime is partial to applying strictness in restricted areas, giving priority first to the party interest (there is no other way of explaining some of the silent and loud policies). While the regime is tough on the opposition political movements, it is meek in controlling the traffic congestion in Dhaka, caused by unauthorised vehicles and drivers. Nepotism is being openly practised. The government is too lenient on the vendors thronging the public footpaths — a pitiable case of

misplaced kindness. Open partiality is a hidden menace.

The Ministry of Industries has been denuded of the luscious fruits and is neglected to enjoy the unpalatable leftovers (SOEs, public sector). The ministry of I&B is hanging on to radio and television as past mistresses - a bad habit of past association. The systems loss of the secretariat has gone down, as the ministers are too busy consolidating on semi-public ventures.

The younger generations are being taught the wrong principles through bad examples.

Now the armed cadres in the political parties are being rein-

forced to fight it out openly with arms, to maintain the political supremacy of the political parties. This is a transparency in the sense that politics has come into the open in the outdoors, and the arms are not being hidden either from the eyes of the police or the cameras. The greed for personal power and wealth has exceeded all norms. This state cannot be sustained, and Dhaka may soon see what has been in many third world countries (especially in Africa).

The rise of terrorism at the international level should be a matter of concern to the government, as Bangladesh may be on the hit list anytime, on some flimsy excuse, either internally at higher level, or externally,

involving innocent lives or that of some top leaders. This is not unexpected, as violence will take its ultimate toll, regardless

Dhaka.

of affiliation.

#### When will the government wake up?

Sir, I was deeply shocked at the death of the LGRD joint secretary, Nikunja Bihari Debnath who was stabbed to death by muggers on the DU campus on January 11, 2000 while he was returning home from the railway station. The muggers killed him because he had only 100 taka to offer. The incident is so inhuman, so pathetic that words fail us. We are stunned by this cruelty.

The law and order of the country will not improve ur 1:ss the government wakes up from the slumber and tackle the situation keeping in mind that the protection of the people is their first priority -- not to contrive ways to remain in power.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

#### Different strokes

Sir, The World Bank Country Director's interview to DS (Jan 6 and earlier) on the development of the electric power sector in Bangladesh had sufficient depth and breadth for enhancing the awareness level of the consumers, in respect of the technicalities involved at high policy and management levels, to bring about the necessary changes for the required reforms in this essential utility

all the records. Give her some

All this is happening in an environment highly sensitive both at the global and national levels. How the politicians look at the whole exercise on longtime basis, noting the brittle political situation in the country at present, with political stability a long way off? While the multinational partners in the private sector seem to be pressing for regional concept in doing business, the empathy within the SAARC member countries is not conducive to cross-border transactions (per cent trade within the SAARC partners).

As for the political longterm guarantees by the succeed ing regimes, elected or otherwise, decision making on high level policies appear to be forbidding at this point of time Therefore the existence of apparent hesitancy is understandable. The sine qua non is first the political-stability.

Even with the go-ahead signal by the government, the internal environment within the affected power agencies is infested with entrenched interests, as can be gathered from the pitiable state of the SOEs. which have baffled almost all the regimes since reformation exercises were being talked about. It is like breaking up many hornets" nests. The balanced views of the truncated parliament could not be tapped during the decade of the 1990s. due to lingering political confrontations, even after change

of a regime. It appears that without political will and concurrence, the placidity in the power sector may continue to haunt the nation for quite sometime yet.

Then there is the invisible hurdle of nepotism and corrupt practices at ALL levels in almost all areas (civil), political and public sectors): policy, financial management, operation, and maintenance; at a time when the global market forces are at work (to the disadvantage of the LDCs, as seen in Seattle); and decentralisation is a recurring refrain. Almost all developing countries have to go through and surmount this unpleasant phase of national development. A Husnain Dhaka

#### Unfortunate

Sir, We are so unfortunate that even our martyrs are not spared from the destructive politics. On the 14th December '99, our Martyred Intellectual's Day and on 16th December, our Victory Day the general people could not lay wreaths at the memorials due to chaotic situation. On the Martyred Intellectual's Day, barriers were irrected in the name of prime minister's security. Many respectable personalities and leaders of the eleven-party alliances left the Smriti Shoudha on protest.

On the Victory Day, again some unruly people created chaotic situation. They scattered flowers from the Smriti Shoudha. It was really unfortu-

nate Our martyrs made their supreme sacrifices for the nation but we have totally failed to live up to their expectations. The authority concerned failed miserably to maintain peace at these places. I therefore, would like to propose that a national observance committee should

member that these sacred places are not for destructive politics. We go there to pay tribute to our martyrs not to show our unruly behaviour. This type of politics must change.

be formed in the future to avoid

such vandalism. We must re-

Sheikh Akhtarul Islam Dhaka

> Encroachment upon public thoroughfares

Sir, Not only the hawkers and vendors have illegally occupied the public roads and streets and created traffic jams but almost all the shop-keepers in the city have illegally expanded their legal area of ownership and encroached upon the public thoroughfares displaying and selling their various goods, commodities and merchandise. They have even placed tables, almirahs and chairs on public roads to run their business. These create Sbarricade and hindrances for the members of the public to move freely.

We fail to understand as to why the members of public are deprived of their civic right to move freely on the public thoroughfares and the law enforcing authorities, especially the DCC and DMP, are sitting idle?

Would the law enforcing authorities help restore the constitutional right of the members of public to move freely from one place to another?

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