

Public Crushed under Politics of Revenge

THE responsibility for Sunday's pandemonium, in our considered opinion, falls squarely on the government. We would like to know what actually instigated the police into launching an assault on the procession, which was by and large peaceful. We see in the police action a reflection of the ruling party's premeditated design to thwart the opposition programme at any cost. Completely unwarranted and despicable as the police's intervention was, it carried the signature of the government's inclination to encroach upon the democratic right of its political adversaries to peaceful and disciplined demonstration. We would want to record our displeasure and condemnation at the government's repressive role in this particular case. Sadly, Sunday's fracas was not one of its kind, nor did the government or its law enforcement agency unnecessarily push a situation to the verge of total lawlessness for the first time. In fact, the ruling party has, from the very beginning of its tenure, put on display a disturbing inclination towards trampling the opposition's democratic rights under foot. Such a mindset is not only irrational but also detrimental to its own political interest, inevitably swaying public sympathy in the opposition's favour.

The opposition's role is to be equally condemned, if not more. Understandably, the activists were enraged by the police intervention; but why take it out on public property? The orgy of destruction that they indulged in just after the police action was anything else but reflective of their pro-people commitment. They are no less culpable than the ruling party when it comes to inflicting on the citizenry utter discomfort, not to speak of the damage of life and property. Equally illogical, as usual, was their instantaneous call for three days of hartal—12 hours on Tuesday and 36 hours from Wednesday. What logic is there to hold the nation hostage to their grievance against the government? It seems that the opposition has blurred the difference between agitation and infliction of pain to people. Hasn't the nation paid enough price for its overindulgence in hartal?

Step by step we are going into a dark hole of mindless, vengeful, destructive politics. As the political parties feud, ground from under the feet of both AL and BNP is shifting and criminal elements are filling up that space. We urge our leaders from both sides to realise the suicidal nature of their politics and desist from destroying the country any further.

A Home Secy at Last

THE government has at last been able to appoint a Home Secretary. For two weeks this powerful position remained vacant in the absence of a 'trustworthy' bureaucrat. The new appointee has been brought back from his LPR (Leave Preparatory to Retirement) to fill in the vacancy caused by the retirement of former secretary Shafiq Rahman who was also there on contract basis. This is a unique case of an important position remaining vacant for a long time in spite of the fact that a number of Additional Secretaries did not get new position because of 'credibility crisis', according to a report in the *Prothom Alo* on Monday. At first the present secretary of the communications ministry was appointed Home Secretary in place of the retiring one but the appointment was cancelled within 24 hours for reasons best known to the government.

The position of Home Secretary is normally recognised as a 'hot seat' and a very powerful one at that and there should not be any dearth of contenders for this powerful position among the bureaucrats. But the intention of the ruling party is very clear. Unless they find someone absolutely trustworthy they are not going to take any chances, specially during the last 18 months of their rule. There were names in the fray and lot of speculation, but the government's unbridled liking for politicisation of the administration has had its impact on the appointment. It is amusing to note that finally some one had to be selected from the retiring lot once again.

However, we mean no disrespect to the new Home Secretary; in fact he enjoys a considerable reputation as a professional officer. While welcoming him we would only like to remind the government that professional bureaucrats are far better than ideologues as administrators. We wish the new Home Secretary all success as his tenure is likely to be quite difficult.

Worthy Initiative

INSTANT success of the on-the-spot electric connection initiative, which got underway at East Bakalia ward in Chittagong last Sunday, has proved that complicated subscription formalities with their additional harassment, at times, induce many to opt for illegal consumption of electricity. On-the-spot connection is indeed a novelty born out of desperation but it was effective nevertheless. Its success surely adds a positive dimension to the Power Development Board's fight against systems loss and pilferage. While illegal connection has often been ascribed as one of the major reasons of extremely high systems loss in electric supply, not much thought has been given to ascertain the reason why people go for it. The East Bakalia experience certainly encourages a different outlook on the whole issue.

Basically, the moral of this small-scale yet significant success is: the PDB must see to it that the prospective subscribers are not deterred by cumbersome formalities. The duration between application for connection and installation of power lines and supply should be truncated as much as possible. There should be direct contact between the PDB and the applicants, precluding presence of middlemen. Many prospective subscribers having been cheated by the middlemen were forced to go for illegal connection.

The East Bakalia initiative is a demonstration of what proper planning and wit can do. We hope the PDB would take cue from its success and direct its effort accordingly. Subscriber-friendly approach such as the on-the-spot connection could very well bring about an improvement in the electricity supply scenario.

NOTHING succeeds in the media like middle class stereotypes. One such is about the "soft", "liberal", Atal Behari Vajpayee, fondly called "the right man in the wrong party" and credited with pluralism, moderation, even secularism. This shows Mr Vajpayee as the Boy on the Burning Deck, fighting a lonely battle to tame the *sangh parivar's* "lunatic fringe".

Three recent developments compel one to reject the stereotype and recognise that the "fringe" is becoming the mainstream: Mr Vajpayee's reckless nuclear threat-mongering; his endorsement of Gujarat's decision to allow government employees to join the RSS; and his role in the campaign against Deepa Mehta's *Water*.

Mr Vajpayee's anti-Pakistan vituperation at Jalandhar represents the most sinister Indian statement yet of nuclear bellicosity. He bellowed: "They think that they will drop one bomb and they'll win and we lose... They are wrong. We have said we won't be the first to use nuclear weapons, but if anyone uses them against us, we will not wait for our annihilation."

This seriously degrades India's professed No-First-Use posture. Such war-mongering establishes mutual confidence even in peacetime. Worse could happen in a military crisis.

Mr Vajpayee's statement

comes a fortnight after Mr George Fernandes enunciated a new, dangerous, doctrine: "limited wars" between nuclear states. He exhorted Pakistan to "absorb the real meaning of nuclearisation", viz. nuclear weapons don't deter all wars; only nuclear wars; India could "fight and win" an "unlimited" war at any time Pakistan chooses.

This chilling statement follows the exchange of 13 nuclear threats between India and Pakistan during Kargil. At no time during the Cold War did nuclear states indulge casually in such threat-mongering.

Mr Vajpayee's statement is irresponsibly dangerous. This is not the Vajpayee who offered reconciliation to Pakistan. This is the viscerally anti-Pakistan *pracharak*, who declares that the only "Kashmir issue" is how Pakistan will vacate PoK. This is no different from the ultra-chauvinism of rabid communalists on both sides of the border. This is *Panchajanya* with a loudspeaker.

A similar hardened stance propelled Mr Vajpayee to endorse Gujarat's order on the RSS. The statement was not in response to President Narayanan's query. Mr Vajpayee made it on his own, claiming the RSS is only a "socio-cultural" organisation.

This claim is dangerously false. That the RSS doesn't contest elections means little. It has a well-defined political agenda, that of "one people, one nation, one culture", with *Hindutva* at the core. This authoritarian agenda promotes Hindu primacy.

The RSS has policies on the economy, security, and foreign affairs. It has a view on everything: from the origins of the Aryans, on how women should dress, to the CTBT and Kashmir.

The RSS controls and dominates the explicitly political BJP. All top BJP leaders have RSS loyalties and pay it *guru dakshina*. Three years ago, the RSS decided that all BJP state presidents must be *pracharaks*. Sometimes, it even directs government formation. In 1998, it

vetoed Jaswant Singh's inclusion in the Cabinet.

The RSS uses the "cultural" label to evade accountability and operates as an undemocratic cabal.

By justifying the Gujarat order, Mr Vajpayee undermines the basic political neutrality of the bureaucracy, central to democracy. In democracy, the civil service isn't a spoils system. Civil servants are professionals who impartially and Constitutionally execute decisions taken by elected leaders. Once you allow them to join politics, you hurt democracy. That is what Mr Vajpayee has done.

Taking a cue from him, Uttar Pradesh has allowed its employees to join the RSS. And now Mr Advani threatens to do the same at the Centre.

Politicising the bureaucracy is especially dangerous when the political agency is a hate-driven body that violates Constitutional secularism and pluralism. A pro-RSS bureaucrat who regards all Muslims as po-

tential ISI agents cannot possibly treat all citizens fairly.

A pro-RSS policeman cannot protect all citizens against communal violence—any more than a wolf can guard chickens. Which states have declared the RSS unlawful? Irrelevant. In truth, it is an extremely undemocratic political organisation. Whitewashing it the Vajpayee way is a disgrace to democracy.

No less shameful is the role Vajpayee supporters played in the *Water* episode—a black mark on our democracy. *Hindutva* vandals harassed the Mehta crew, terrorised the local citizenry, censored her script, and then kicked her out of Varanasi. If this is not "jungle raj", then what is?

Mehta was wrong to have agreed to the cuts, but her freedom of expression must be defended.

It is impossible to sever Mr Vajpayee from the episode. The "Vajpayee hand" was disclosed when Mr Lalji Tandon rose to defend the Varanasi vandals, and the way the UP CM acted.

Mr Tandon, a dedicated Vajpayee-ite, was his personal campaign manager in Lucknow. Mr Vajpayee has always favoured him—to the point of antagonising Mr L.K. Advani by breaking an agreement to exclude him from the Gupta Cabinet. Mr Gupta cannot even think on his own, and never acts without consulting Mr Vajpayee.

It is Mr Vajpayee who runs the UP BJP. His interest in UP is related to his political strategy of consolidating upper caste support, while giving up on the OBCs. Whipping up hysteria against *Water* through organisations like the Kashi Vidwat Parishad and Sanskriti Suraksha Sangharsh Samiti fits snugly into this. It is also related to the BJP's desperation in the coming UP byelections.

Mr Vajpayee cannot be excused for the cultural terror visited upon Varanasi—known for its tolerance and pluralism, for its Bismillah Khan and its Siddheshwari Devi. Many secular people thought Mr Vajpayee is the "liberal" face of *Hindutva*. They made fanciful distinctions between him and hardcore *sanghis*, who are hawkish on Pakistan and use clear weapons, and defend RSS-VHP vandalism.

Mr Vajpayee's "soft" facade is deceptive. The *sangh*, as he himself said, is his "soul".

Between 'Water' and the Bomb

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

It is Mr Vajpayee who runs the UP BJP. His interest in UP is related to his political strategy of consolidating upper caste support, while giving up on the OBCs. Whipping up hysteria against 'Water' through organisations like the Kashi Vidwat Parishad and Sanskriti Suraksha Sangharsh Samiti fits snugly into this. It is also related to the BJP's desperation in the coming UP byelections.

KASHMIR CRISIS

Resolve Remains as Elusive as Ever

by A R Shamsul Islam

How could one hope that Kashmir crisis will be resolved in near future? India will not go beyond bilateral talks. Pakistan terms them as unending dilatory tools. US's present foreign policy in the subcontinent does not need her to take more than a philosopher's role of observation and sermonizing, under threat of economic sanctions, messages of peace to the aberrant.

agreement was signed by Pakistan and India in 1976 which envisaged, inter alia, that dispute between the two countries would be settled by mutual discussions. This is the point that India has closely stuck to her advantage.

As time agitations started as soon as an Indian Airlines Boeing 737 was hijacked on Christmas eve when India accused almost instinctively Pakistan of masterminding the incident. Quick came Pakistan's retort, as if reciting from memory, that hijacking was a stage-managed show of India designed to demean and demonise Pakistan in the eye of the world.

A few days later following shellings beyond the Line of Control in the Chamb area in which 07 Pakistani soldiers were reported to have been killed Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf warned to check India a good lesson in case she made any more offensive against Pakistani soldiers. Thereupon Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh asked Pakistan to refrain from threatening India. Musharraf proposed dialogues with India straightaway focusing on Kashmir. Vajpayee first said no talks with Pakistan unless she shunned fomenting cross-border insurgency. A day later he stated New Delhi liked to talk with Islamabad with focus on vacation of Pak-held Kash-

mir.

Pakistan feels Jammu and Kashmir territory is her rightful entitlement. She resents India took it away in collusion with its ruler Maharaja Hari Singh and feels, if China can take back Hong Kong (1997) and Macau (1999) after centuries of respectively British and Portuguese rule why will not Pakistan get back Jammu and Kashmir? She alleges India accepting logic and reasoning to settle Kashmir issue, it throws sophisms one after another to bog down the dispute and its philosophy of bilateral talks is a hoax.

Last year Pakistan precipitated Kargil war. It was not aimed to be an end. It was thought to prove means to an end. Pakistan wanted to internationalise the Kashmir issue by initiating that war with India on the Himalayan peaks. Pakistan expected the support of her old allies China and US to her cause. But because of change of world political scenario after the end of cold war, almost extinction of socialism and breakup of the USSR, her allies China and US had realigned their political equations that did not advise them (US, China) to side with Pakistan against India. Unfortunately Pakistan could not visualise beforehand the readjusted policies of US and China. However, one thing is that as world

powers held Pakistan responsible for Kargil War, they also probably noted down in their minds the responsibilities of India to refuse persistently to settle Kashmir problem.

There are some factors of importance which India cannot possibly afford to ignore. Firstly, India could not make Pakistan relinquish her claim to Jammu and Kashmir in spite of India's ruling the territory for long 52 years. Secondly, India has never been able to put down 10-year old Muslim separatists' insurgency in that province which has claimed over 25,000 lives. Thirdly, she has been suffering a constant and costly drain on her coffers to employ a huge army to fight the rebels. Fourthly, she could not do appreciable development works in the province of Jammu and Kashmir providing for well-being and peace of the people. Fifthly, she is unwilling to give full autonomy to Abdullah's provincial government in

Jammu and Kashmir on the plea that this sanction will fuel the separatist tendency of other provinces against the federal government. The centre only blames Abdullah for failure to contain the rebels. Sixthly, her detonation of nuclear bombs in 1998 was quickly followed by Pakistan's exploding similar bombs despite warnings from US to Pakistan to refrain from taking such actions. Pakistan's actions thwarted India's desire to show off her enhanced image as a nuclear power in preference to Pakistan's conventional military stature.

Seventhly, India has stoutly defended against entry of a third party in discussions on Kashmir dispute calling it a (third party) unnecessary. But didn't she herself break this point by sending emissaries, during last year's Kargil war, to Washington to meet Clinton to convince him of India's stand and Pakistan's machinations? Probably this was the first time

that India sought help of a third power in combating Kashmir crisis. Didn't Indian diplomacy by the above act acknowledge the need of third party into solving Kashmir issue? Eighthly, India and Pakistan have emerged as nuclear powers. A war between them may develop into a nuclear warfare causing destruction of unprecedented magnitude and gross destabilization of South Asia. As a superguardian of world peace, US feels it expedient to keep a careful eye on the activities of India and Pakistan so that they do not enter into a nuclear war. US may have perceived Kashmir being a very sensitive issue is better to be solved out than letting it move to a flash point of nuclear war between two hostile neighbours. However these are not the matters that do have merit of causing troubles in early days.

Then how could one hope that Kashmir crisis will be resolved in near future? India will not go beyond bilateral talks. Pakistan terms them as irritants that play into the hands of India as unending dilatory tools. US's present foreign policy in the subcontinent does not need her to take more than a philosopher's role of observation and sermonizing, under threat of economic sanctions, messages of peace to the aberrant. So the brutal reality is that in the present time solution to Kashmir problem remains as elusive as ever.

OPINION

Book for College Libraries

This is a good example of how a good idea is spoiled by bad execution. The government recently realised that our college libraries should be helped not directly by money grant but by direct supply of around 300 books. As the report goes, a budget allocation of Tk. three crore was made for this purpose, and it was proposed that 500 colleges, government and non-government, should benefit from this windfall of munificence at the government level. As to justify the common complaint that the present government is one of the bureaucrats, by the bureaucrats, and for the bureaucrats, the committee set up for the selection of 300 suitable books for our college students consisted mostly of bureaucrats.

So, the inevitable has happened. The committee, according to our reports, has finalised a list of books in which members of the present government headed by the Prime Minister, MPs and Awami League leaders have contributed as many as 64 books. The list reportedly has seven books by the PM, eight by five ministers, 12 by Awami League MPs/leaders, 15 by 11 journalists (to placate the group?) and a mere 14 by the

member-secretary. The list, we are further told, has books of no worth, of any conceivable interest for the target readers and could only be included with self-promotional motives. Recognised writers whose inclusion would normally be taken for granted are, for no obvious reason, conspicuous by their absence.

The question one is tempted to ask is, who formed this committee whose selection of books is seen to be so erratic? Who are these people so callous about the needs of college students, so cynically ignorant about writers and their works? Is the Prime Minister aware that some zealots have, in their wrongheaded desire to please her, as sycophantic bureaucrats are wont to do, have actually tarnished her image and have done her a political disservice? Democratic political norm does not permit promotion of books by the members of a government, let alone by a Prime Minister and others of her government, at the expense of public funds. The whole action smacks of self-aggrandisement and partisanship in the worst possible taste. One can only hope that a shameful act like this should be brought to the notice of the Prime Minister.

She must not allow something that can only bring disrepute to herself and her government.

Kaiser Habib
Indira Road, Dhaka

Postscript to a note penned by someone I know.

I did not care to see that the note receives publicity when the incident was fresh and new and when quite a few angry reactions were actually printed in some of our dailies. I also came across a few rejoinders written in a different vein, lauding the idea and also its expression. That was about a year ago.

Here is a word of explanation why I dig up this note and this issue of governmental patronisation of book publishing as trade which also, only supposedly, goes to help build college libraries across the country. Shall we see again this year, this February, a repetition of the same shameless act of self-aggrandisement at the expense of eager students hungry for good books? These books are there in the market, only some vested interest, entrenched in the citadel of bureaucracy, is standing between them and the hapless college students of Bangladesh.

Where is Individualism?

Alif Zabr

President Shahabuddin way of approach and way of thinking looking at the state of the society (address to the Asiatic Society, DS, Jan 27) is quite different from the way the political leaders point issues out to the citizens. The President bemoaned the lack of individuality (and moral courage) in the Bangladeshi character (in the vast majority of the scholars and intellectuals), and the tendency to seek group support.

One is reminded how badly we need an Emerson in our fermented society after a revolution there is surge of regeneration, after a period of confusion and settling down. The nation has missed the bus, and is walling in mud-slinging and petty squabbles.

The politicians have their own way of explaining the good things of life, provided the voters followed their own precepts. The nation has lost its political vision, focus, and sense of direction, being led by narrow-minded opportunists, or sincere souls quite unfit to handle the assignment of steering and guiding to the cherished goals. The basic princi-

ples of these goals are simple enough for any layman to grasp, but the problems arise at the nuts and bolts levels. It is the divergent leadership which is holding up progress (not only in Bangladesh).

Trying to sell an agenda is done everywhere, but here the intolerance is intolerable, and the thrust of the zest from a single quarter is full of imposition ("take it, or...").

Of the six billion people on earth, no two think alike, therefore amity in diversity has to be accepted in principle, for peaceful living. The formulae for regimented life styles cannot be applied under pressure, because the principle of the freedom of the individual will prevail. One must be prepared to suffer for holding up to one's belief while trying to cleanse one's society. There is too much group dependence. We cannot move unless we are in herds. The individual's moral courage has to be reignited. Are we mentally cowardly, opportunists, lazy and unpractical? It is a self-question, for self-examination.

In the life cycles of a new nation, there are certain

national assignments at certain periods of development. We are entangled with a bundle of pending issues for the last 30 years, and our leadership is unable to sort it out at their levels, causing severe national loss.

New, practical visionaries are needed to lead the nation. The stalemate cannot continue for ever. The breakdown period arrives before the advent of the spring, symbolically speaking, for a new and clean beginning. Who and where are the new leaders of the society; not simply political leaders?

The current old-time politicians are not allowing space to others, while going for the overkill. This type of instability cannot last long, because the basic conditions of stability are being interfered with. The leaders who are irresponsible have to face the music, as it is happening in nations. The call is for self-reliance, and belief in what is morally right. Compromise at the highest level is damaging to the society. Individuals must differ and shy away seeking group support.

Food stalls at the DITF

Sir, Yesterday night my wife and I ended up paying Tk. 400 for 2 small pieces of chicken at a food stall at the DITF. They were demanding Tk. 800 initially. There are no rates, and basically they take whatever they can from the poor customers. One gentleman was promised Tk. 20 for a plate of *fuchka* and ended up paying Tk. 100. All these food stalls or restaurants are being run by an organised bunch of thugs. Please advise the general public to stay clear of these people.

Street robbers have simply moved indoors.

Rathan Khan
Dhaka

Black laws for black activities

Sir, "Black" Laws are meant for "black" activities. These Laws are also meant for suspected activities in the 'grey areas'. The majority of the grey areas are normally captured, controlled, or operated upon by the supporters of the ruling parties, who indulge in such activities as terrorism, toll collection, political pressure, and other activities based on nepotism, which may or may not involve violence.

That is why the neutral observers and opponents call such laws "black laws", where unchallenged discrimination could be applied. The misuse or overuse of power is a recurring theme in emerging societies, especially in the developing countries, where the materialistic urges tug in the wrong directions, causing ripples in the society, and the innocent suffer. Political and social consensus is necessary to curb misuse of the powers. Naked powers must be properly clothed or dressed, to avoid moral indecency.

The regulators need at least two pre-qualifications: the benefit of the doubt can be enjoyed by the operators; and the parties or agencies involved in regulatory work and the institutions behind it must be above suspicion. To achieve this clearance, the creation of the right governing environment has to be undertaken first, before descending into the technicalities of a case.

nicalities of a case.

Any Law can be promulgated and applied; but where is the Check List, and how has it been drafted and cleared for approval and application? The parliament is not functioning, therefore the avenues for public feedbacks through the opposition are not available. The infrastructure must be there in place before the application of the required laws. If the balance is not there, the resultant will tilt towards a certain direction. Balanced application is a requirement of public interest.

A Husnain
Dhaka

'In the Taliban Court'

Sir, I would like to thank you for your discreet and timely editorial of February 8, 2000. It reminds me of a proverb where a man who makes a hole/well for others to fall, falls himself. If we try to assess the history of modern terrorism, it would reveal the truth of dual international diplomacy and politics at the cost of the weak, regionally and globally.

Let us hope that the Taliban would take lesson from the recent plane hijack of its national airline. The sooner, the better.

Abul Ashraf Noor
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Rabies injection

Sir, We know that rabies injection is the only preventive measure for hydrophobia. Except this injection, there is no remedy to it. But it is of great regret that this injection is not easily available in our country. Only public Health Centre of Mohakhali supplies this injection and people need to come to Mohakhali from different parts of the country to collect the injection. One suffering from hydrophobia first needs to collect a local hospital certificate. Then he/she has to produce that certificate to the health office to get the injection.

It is not easy to come to Dhaka from remote areas. During political unrest it becomes more difficult. On the other hand, transportation fee is high

a well.

Therefore, we request the authorities concerned to distribute rabies injection to each district hospital for easy availability.

Md Nurul Islam
Lecturer in Bangla
Kaliakaur Degree College,
Kaliakaur, Gazipur.

Absurd construction rules

Sir, Housing is one of the biggest problems in our country. In every cities through out the developing world, multi-storied buildings and double unit flats are being built to solve this problem. However, our country is an exception. Soon the population of Dhaka will exceed one crore. But today the number of multi-storied buildings and double unit flats are less than one per cent out of the total number buildings in the city.

Those who own a plot of two kathas i.e. 1440 sq. ft. while constructing a house need not require to spare any space on the sides, front or back. Unfortunately those who own a plot of two and half kathas i.e. 1800 sq. ft., have to spare at least 550 sq. ft. on the sides, front and back and make a house within the remaining 1250 sq. ft. As a result, the plot owners are compelled to construct a single unit house. Those who own two kathas can build a house of 1440 sq. ft. but those who own two and half kathas have to build a house of 1250 sq. ft. What sort of a logic is this? It is also worth mentioning here that more than ninety per cent of the government and private housing societies are on two and half kathas of plots. As a result, the housing problems in the country especially in Dhaka is increasing alarmingly. If double-unit flats could be built on 1800 sq. ft. several laacs of small and medium families could live there and also the house rent would have reduced noticeably.

As such, we appeal to the Minister for Works to pass orders so that those who own plots of two and half kathas i.e. 1800 sq. ft., need not spare any space.

Mrs Sultana Razia
Mirpur, Dhaka.