

The Daily Star

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Indonesia is Steadying the Ship of State

The lesson that can be drawn from the tussle between President Abdul Wahid and Gen Viranto is that after a long winter of military and family dictatorship Indonesia is waking up to a new dawn full of promise for her and the neighbours around.

Not Even an Excuse Exists for Another Hartal

BY the time this sees daylight we will have stepped out of the dungeon we were thrown into by the Opposition's 48-hour hartal call. But before savouring the sense of relief we hear that the four-party opposition alliance is going to imprison us again. And this time for no less than sixty hours — with another strike plan being designed for February 27 to 29 — evidently in a state of indecent desperation to use every conceivable slot for a hartal call. For instance, the SSC examinations commence on March 3 seemingly obliging the opposition not to squander any opportunity to impose a bigger hartal on the citizenry prior to that. Similarly, another occasion, namely Eid-ul-Azha, is being factored into the opposition's decision-making about further shutdown programmes as if they have to fill a certain quota of hartals regardless of their justifiability in light of the prevailing public mood or transparent political circumstances. Their desperation to pack all the 'free days' of the months of February and March with hartals is as despicable for its insensitivity to public good as it is foolhardy for being blind to even their self-interest.

Setting aside the all-too-known valid arguments against hartals — a heavier price being exacted on politics, economy, work ethics and traffic habits, and law and order with each passing hartal — let's focus on two latest developments that render hartal completely untenable. First, the President has approved the draft ordinance placed before him by the Law Minister which squares up with the former's objections to certain provisions of the Public Safety Act he had earlier assented to but with some reservations. The refusal of bail during the pendency of an appeal is being redressed. So is on the way out the clause about sentencing an accused on the strength of written testimony from a witness without subjecting him to any cross-examination. The ordinance is expected to set right some other inadequacies of the Act as well.

This paper has been the strongest critic of the Public Safety Act and will continue to be so keeping a watchful eye on how it is used even in the amended form. At the same time, for the sake of professional correctness we have to tell the opposition that they no longer have any pretext in the SPA to call for a countrywide shutdown on. More so because of their losing any moral right to be doing it against the backdrop of the preceding BNP government's adoption of the infamous Anti-Terrorism Act in 1994.

Secondly, what seems key to the unlocking of their political horns is this: We cannot, repeat cannot, see any basic difference between the ruling party's position and that of the opposition BNP on the question of early general elections. The Prime Minister is willing to bring the elections forward and so is Khaleda Zia keen on getting the dates advanced; but only after forcing the government's resignation, a redundant demand when a little over one year is left for the next general election. That the time span is absolutely necessary for the electoral preparations Begum Zia must be knowing better than many being herself an election veteran.

BNP Secretary-General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has categorically asserted that his party wants the national elections held before the upazilla polls. And if one were to plumb deeper into the implications of the already delayed local government polls one might discern a certain hesitation in the ruling party's approach not to risk one-sided elections there.

The underlying objective conditions, therefore, should be seen in the right spirit by both the government and the opposition to get a dialogue underway at the soonest. The principal moot-point should be the initiation of a process of preparation for the next general election on the basis of a mutually agreed electoral reform package. The election, of course, will be held under the stewardship of an interim caretaker government we have a standing provision for.

THE latest events in Indonesia tend to suggest that the country is settling down to normal life. It would seem that a confrontation between the civil Government and the armed forces has been averted. This is all for the good of Indonesia, the largest Muslim state, for the ASEAN and the entire region to which Bangladesh belongs.

Indonesia had more than three decades of military dictatorship, which turned into a vast family rule. At the apex was President Suharto and his large family. They seemed to enjoy the maximum fruits of the riches of this country of more than 3000 islands. The great development strides taken by Indonesia resulted in trickling down of the prosperity with the result that Indonesia does not suffer from abject poverty in any section of her population. This is the most important reason why Indonesia has remained a relatively stable country.

Indonesia became independent from Dutch rule nearly half a century ago. Leadership for independence was provided by the charismatic leader Ahmed Sukarno. He became famous for his leadership role within the non-aligned group along with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Yugoslav President Tito and Egyptian President Nasser. These were the days of the Cold War and the countries rising from the long shackles of colonialism, wanted to play a role within the two groups of East and West led by the USA and the USSR. When military coups became the fashion in the late fifties and early sixties — coups often with the blessing of the USA — Indonesia fell victim to such a plot and taking advantage of ethnic strife Gen. Suharto seized power and overthrew the popular leader Sukarno.

Indonesia is very rich in natural resources and has abundant supply of oil and gas and mineral resources and timber. The explosion of the price of energy of the mid seventies saw fortune smile on Indonesia and she became a major player within the ASEAN and the region.

In the late nineties challenge to the established authority of Suharto started becoming vocal. The main challenger to Suharto's regime became the daughter of late President Sukarno, Megawati Sukarnoputri. The challenge was mounted mainly by the student community but rapidly spilled onto the streets and violent clashes took place between the students and the security forces. The appearance of Sukarnoputri to lead the protests gave considerable weight to the vociferous opposition demand asking Suharto to step down.

It is to the credit of Indonesians of all stripes including specially of the authority that transition was arranged smoothly. Proper elections were held and Sukarnoputri emerged as a leader of consequence. Yet she did not have enough support to form a Government. Abdul Wahid, until

pleaded some years ago against the wishes of his Christian population. Giving complete backing to East Timor's desire for independence was the European countries led by Portugal, the erstwhile master of that island. A referendum was organised under the UN auspices and predictably the tiny island with a very small population voted for independence.

then a relatively unknown leader was named President and this frail gentleman promptly named Sukarnoputri as his Vice President. This was a very astute move because street protests died down. The new Government of Indonesia faced an immediate challenge in East Timor, an island that Indonesia had occupied

The latest turn of events in Indonesia has to do with East Timor. According to a report the former chief of the Indonesian armed forces and current Defense Minister in the cabinet of President Wahid, Gen. Wiranto is reported to have committed atrocities against the civilian population of East Timor, during the military operation. Gen. Wiranto has strongly denied these accusations and has demanded independent enquiry. President Wahid, who was on a trip of Europe during the crisis, dismissed his defense Minister and a tussle went on because Gen. Wiranto refused to step down. President Wahid may have been motivated to move swiftly against Gen Wiranto because he did not want to have the West on his back and found an ideal opportunity to cut his links with the fallen regime of Gen. Suharto.

Not on his return to Jakarta President Wahid has removed Gen Wiranto and named another retired General to succeed him. From these events it is clear

that a real tug of war took place between the civilian authority and the military establishment and it would seem that the civilian authority has the upper-hand. Gen Wiranto was the trusted armed forces chief during Suharto and his presence within the administration of Wahid created an image of disarray, which to some extent diluted the civil power. From this tussle President Abdul Wahid's authority emerges reinforced. This will give an opportunity to the civilian power to settle down.

Indonesia is an important member of that remarkable organisation — ASEAN. It has been a success story for ASEAN all the way. The most important reason is no doubt that ASEAN does not interfere in the domestic affairs of any member state and satisfies itself in playing a leading role in the economic field. This has brought prosperity to all its members. How different is it from our SAARC, which remains a moribund organisation.

The lesson that can be drawn from the tussle between President Abdul Wahid and Gen Wiranto is that after a long winter of military and family dictatorship Indonesia is waking up to a new dawn full of promise for her and the neighbours around.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

Corruption in Arms Trade

One hopes that Pakistan, always under pressure because of declining availability of foreign exchange in the face of security imperatives, will take concrete steps to ensure elimination of corruption of arms trade in the future. Instead of putting in money into corrupt hands, "more bang for the illegal buck", let's strive to get "more bang out of our buck".

WHILE commissions are a part of business transactions, bribes and kickbacks have been a common occurrence. Commissions are legitimate per se and do not constitute any illegality but when excessive they have been mostly used to influence the sale or purchases with bribes and kickbacks to the representatives of the purchasing agency, politicians or government officials who could be in a position to influence both sales and purchase thereof, they are illegal. Over the years commissions paid out in the arms trade have gained notoriety. In the late years of the nineteenth century some conflicts were conveniently arranged by the manufacturers such as Vickers and Krupp to boost their sales (remember arms merchant Basil Zaharoff).

At the height of the Cold War, large outlays were set aside in the "free world" for defence purchases, most of it unrelated to the fight against communism. To influence the sales of defence equipment, large commissions (direct translation — "bribe") were paid, mostly to tin-pot dictators, absolute monarchs, etc. With the Soviet Union fading out as a Superpower in the 80s, the need to

shore up autocratic regimes lessened dramatically and commissions paid out to middlemen became more known to the public at large. Morality replaced pragmatism. Military machines like the Shah of Iran's fed the ruler's megalomania and kept the population under control but all this cost a great deal of the oil money available, a sizeable percentage disappearing as bribes into numbered accounts of the Shah's relatives, cronies, etc. Equipment was marked up by as much as 100 per cent or even more, helping to maintain a very opulent lifestyle. A number of sensational disclosures in the late years of the last century and public outcry of the divergence of a sizeable portion of funds from the exchequer have brought corruption in arms trade into focus as an aberration to be brought under control.

Transparency International (TI), the brainchild of Peter Eigen, has done pioneer work in establishing institutional safeguards against corruption. The well-known TI Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranks countries by the degree of corruption perceived among public officials and politicians, drawing on a composite index ranking 99 countries with polls and surveys of residents and non-residents. Pakistan took second place during the Ms Benazir regime in 1995. By 1999 we had made some improvement, descending to 12th place. To address the issue of corruption in arms trade, the Swedish Government took the initiative through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and held a Colloquium in association with TI in Stockholm at the Villa Brevik during 3-6 February 2000. A rather unique gathering of speakers and participants was drawn from representatives of governments and the arms industry, academics and NGOs

were assembled to coalesce a moral force to control corruption hitherto considered "taboo". The Swedish Minister for Trade, Mr. Leif Pagrotsky declared the Colloquium open with the remarks that almost all countries have rules and regulations to curb corrupt practices but due to the bond of silence between those involved, different forms of corruption continue to flourish in many places. He said that the real losers — government, competitors and society at large — rarely have the possibility to react before the damage is done. He said that the cost of corrup-

scrutiny should not be taken in the first place. Paul Beijer, Director, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs then took the chair, assisted by TI, represented by Joe Roeber and Frederick Galtung from UK. Joe Roeber gave concrete examples of corruption in various countries, these included USA, Britain, Europe and the Third World, etc., not excluding Pakistan, mentioning the commissions paid in submarine and aircraft deals. He said arms trade is "hard-wired for corruption", mainly because of the very special treatment it receives from governments and the secrecy that

Legislative Assembly. Retired Admiral Tahilani from India, formerly Chief of Naval Staff in the 80s and now representing Transparency International in India, was very candid about the Bofors issue. There were warning signals but in the haste to acquire the weapons and the inordinate interest shown by the then Indian Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Sunderji, the exposure of the bribery by an enterprising Swedish reporter came as a rude shock in New Delhi. It is widely believed that the major beneficiary was the late Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi, though only part of the Bofors papers handed over by the Government to India have been released, as much as 11-12 per cent of the value of the guns is estimated to have gone into secret accounts. The BJP Government is keeping the scandal very much alive, clearly using it now for political purposes to target the Congress Party led by Rajiv Gandhi's widow Sonia.

Thomas Delare of the US State Department gave a very detailed presentation of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and how the US Government had taken initiatives for adoption of a binding agreement between nations to prevent manufacturers from giving bribes, prosecuting those who did and also those who took the bribes, indulging in money laundering and tax evasion. A number of countries had ratified a detailed OECD resolution on clamping down on corruption. Pakistan was not one of the signatories. Given the elite "club" of commission agents who deal in the arms trade and their dominating influence in the hierarchy, Pakistan is not expected to become one of the signatories soon. The information that may become available may be embarrassing. Scott McKay of Lockheed Martin gave a presentation on the part of

industry, spelling out the safeguards that major US companies like his have instituted to ensure that the nexus between commissions paid as legal remuneration for business transactions do not end up as bribes. Company officials indulging in any activity with even a hint of illegality were to be terminated forthwith and the US Justice Department informed about the evidence for their prosecution.

Dr. Reuben Pedatzur of the University of Tel Aviv, a former pilot in the Israeli Air Force and an Air Force analyst, besides being a journalist for the widely circulated Israeli newspaper "Maariv" described the continuous investigation process in Israel into purchases of arms. This led to the celebrated conviction of a high ranking Israeli officer Brig. Gen. Rami Dotan to a long term in jail in 1992 for accepting bribes of over US\$ 10 million. He said corruption was possible because of (1) the extensive network of personal alliances between manufacturers' representatives and high ranking defence personnel and (2) government and defence industry control of most local defence industries. Sounds familiar? There were presentations by Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch on "Landmines" and Dr. Ravi Singh Pal of SIPRI Sweden besides engaging arguments by Dr. Ian Anthony of SIPRI and Admiral Vidagal of National Naval Syndicate, Brazil.

In the final stage the Colloquium split into three groups comprising (1) industry (2) Government and (3) NGOs and academics. Their discussion points were then pooled in to give a possible action plan to be recommended for the future on a broad front. Stockholm was a very important initiative, for third world countries having limited need to check corruption. One hopes that Pakistan, always under pressure because of declining availability of foreign exchange in the face of security imperatives, will take concrete steps to ensure elimination of corruption of arms trade in the future. Instead of putting in money into corrupt hands, "more bang for the illegal buck", let's strive to get "more bang out of our buck".

Friday Mailbox

Clinton visit

Sir, Has the US government reconfirmed the visit of the US President to Dhaka in March, after the passage of the controversial SPA-2000 bill, which deals with basic human rights? If he does, would it imply the US accepts in principle the contents and intention of this undemocratic bill? The other point is that the two major political parties are engaged in vicious and violent confrontation since the mid-1990s. This may not be the right time for a foreign dignitary to visit Bangladesh, especially the first ever visit by a US President. The parties are on collision course after the passage of the 'black law', in addition to the existing SPA which is several decades old. Clinton has few options as his term is ending. The US might like to clarify the position under these circumstances.

A Citizen Dhaka

Working in East Timor

Sir, It is heartening to know that, like many others, Bangladeshi civil and services personnel are actively working in the reconstruction of the war ravaged East Timor under the United Nations Transitional Assistance to East Timor (UNTAET) mission. The first batch of the Bangladesh Army team (BNGENR-1) reached East Timor on Monday, the 14th February, 2000. Meanwhile, as far as I know there is more scope for employment in East Timor. So, I request the government to make arrangement to send more manpower there.

M Zahidul Haque Bangladesh Agricultural Institute Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

Clean DCC garbage!

Sir, It is a pity the PM is not taking notice of the utter inefficiency of the Dhaka City Corp in running Dhaka. Apart from the excess garbage dotting the landscape, the invasion of the footpaths, sidewalks, street intersections has become intolerable. The city markets are in a chaotic condition as far as enforcement of disciplinary measures is concerned. Nothing is going right with the DCC.

The Enforcement branch of DCC is not functioning at all. How many thousands of infringements have been registered and the incumbents fined or taken to court? The PRO office of DCC is nonexistent (what they will point out?). Occasional bulldozing operations is a sham show of appeasement.

What has happened to the professional efficiency of the DCC officials and staff? No action is visible. Had the Mayor been from the opposition camp, the present government would have gone berserk, as it has with the promulgation of SPA-2000.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Proficiency in English — a national need

Sir, The government is seized with the basic development issues and projects of the millennium, but the official circles are hardly talking about the importance of English for the future

generations. It is a world language, and it cannot be neglected. Bangladesh has to be export-oriented in this smaller world. During the struggle for independence and thereafter, the importance of transition to Bangla was obvious, and it was a natural process to uplift the mother tongue to practical national level. But unfortunately, the study of English by the students was downgraded, and we see the limitations today, when these students enter 'life' and have to earn a living through some profession.

The society has given its verdict — the involuntary popularity of English-medium education which has resulted in the mushrooming of the English-medium schools (with poor regulation), and the craze for 'study abroad'. It would be sentimental to link this trend with questionable patriotism. The programme sector of the local computer industry is bemoaning the general weaknesses of the new generation of youth entering the programming field; as also the general weakness of the office staff in the practical use of English in the private sector engaged in the import-export and other business.

The standard of conversational English is dismally poor in the new generation. Similar situation prevailed in Japan earlier, with the difference that while the Japanese graduate could read fairly easily in English, he was weak in grasping it through the mouth and the ears (like our postgraduates in Arabic/Persian). Now computers are efficient distant teachers.

Today nobody is interfering in the normal national development of the mother tongue Bangla, but the past prejudice about the place of English in educated life should go, and we should go forward to acquire and maintain proficiency in the world language, basically up to a certain minimum level. There should be no taboo and closed-minded approach. Acquiring knowledge and skill have been a liability. Therefore the national policy has to be clear about the place of English in the Bangladeshi national life, and adequate perspective plan and phased annual projects have to be announced to inform and assure the public.

A Husnain Dhaka

Shahjalal University deadlocks

Sir, What is happening at the Shahjalal University. Sylhet is absolutely outrageous. Moreover, what is all the more disgraceful is the role of the so-called pro-liberation people. Had the government been strict about the anarchism prevailing on the campus for more than three months and had the opposition not supported the fundamentalists in order to gain some political mileage, the situation wouldn't have deteriorated so much. And as for those opposing the naming of the university halls after eminent personalities, with due respect to Shahjalal (R) and the hundred saints, I want to ask them that there are quite a number of madrasahs in the country. Have they ever tried to change these names?

Amina Rahman Khan 32, Rajani Basak Lane Patuatali Dhaka

Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

LAST week, an ambush on the heels of a criminal, who was on the lam, turned into anguish for a family in Shyampur. As the frightened members woke up in the middle of the night to the shock of a raid, one of them would be dragged out of the toilet and shot dead by masked men. Another two including a minor girl would receive bullet wounds in the sporadic gunshots fired at them. When the ruthless intruders left the house at the end of their atrocities, nobody offered an apology for disturbing the peace of a family based on false tips. Not to say, it haunts one's intelligence why the DB men accompanied masked men with them, who have been identified as known miscreants, and let them kill someone other than their quarry?

The tragedy in Shyampur evoked the Stygian nightmare of the Hobbesian state of nature, and signified the deplorable quality of life in this country, where people are killed for reasons ranging from fracas over a chicken to friction over a political cause. But when law keepers and its usurpers together break into a house in the middle of the night and walk out slaughtering its resident, it is an extreme example of how society is receding into the anarchy described by Hobbes, 'No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.'

Although some of the Hobbesian words no longer apply, others uncannily resonate the horror of the terrible turbulence happening around us. There is increasing prospect of art and letters in our society now, yet we ought to live in the

escalating fear of violent death. We are no longer solitary and poor as Hobbes described, but we are still miserably poor as we are not yet furnished with the amenities of cable TV, Internet, clubs and shopping arcades, yet life is nasty, brutish, and short. A young man dies in Dhaka in the hand of his cousin and a sixth grader in Mymensingh has to hide from place to place to protect her life and honour from a randy suitor. Man has struggled for centuries to emerge from the state of nature in his quest for the nature of state, which, in Rousseau's words, would defend "the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all...". In his bid to escape the brute force with which the strong subjugates the weak, every European would have done in his own country.

Which essentially means that the four elements of law must be interrelated by superior and sensible moral equality of the sovereign where words of the law will be upheld by impartiality of actions. But how does one find that moral equality under a sovereign, which wants to promulgate strict laws yet keeps mum when DB men and their posse invade private homes to frighten and kill innocent citizens? How can one have faith in the impartiality of the sovereign, which represses opposition activists to seek political vengeance?

This week President Shahabuddin Ahmed gave his consent to the Public Safety Bill, which was earlier passed in the parliament despite objections from the opposition including the domesticated opposition of the ruling party. The President consented under an assurance from the Prime Minister that the clause on bail provision

is sanctioned to cover every aspect of its operation. The other feature is rank apathy, to quote De Gaulle "you cannot teach people to be good and bribery is a way of life in many countries". Joe Roeber said "arms exporters in the rich west bribe the political elite of poor countries to buy weapons they may not need with money they probably cannot afford. Their governments support them on grounds of national economic interest, jobs and security. But there is a price, which is to add uselessly to the supply of arms and unproductively to the burden of debt on the backs of the poorest people in the world". Presentations were then made by Francois Heisbourg of Matra France, Thomas Tjadar of Celsius Sweden, Dag Tornblom of the Association of Defence Industry, Sweden and Dr. Farris Chang, a member of Taiwan's

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enact that the retaliation should be done by the State. In that sense, the family in Shyampur has every right to kill one of those who killed one of its members if the State sits on its hands and does nothing. In *Crato Plato* tells us how certain principles of Socrates arranged a plan by which he could escape to Thessaly. But Socrates contended that he had been condemned by due process of law, and that it would have been wrong to do anything to avoid punishment. Again in *Phaedo*, Plato narrates the last hours of Socrates' life when his friends inquired why suicide was held to be unlawful. Socrates' answer was that man was comparable to a prisoner who had no right to open the door and run away, which was a great mystery he never understood.

That mystery pervades between the passage of the Public Safety Bill and the incident in Shyampur, an uneasy wedge between the due process of law and the abuse of law where people hang in the balance between duty and disdain. The Bill is going to open up the Pandora's box, which will perhaps give us more laws but very little order. The tip of that alarming iceberg, the appetizer to a tasteless tree or what one may choose to call, the sneak preview to the unfolding drama of an imminent reign of terror. If anyone has any illusions about it, let me assure you that so long as the sovereign is nasty and its command and sanctions are brutish, the life of people will continue to be short. Now people have to decide whether they want to accept that fate as their duty or not. Let that decision be the pivotal issue in the next elections.