

Live up to the Peace Accord

SINCE the signing of the peace accord in Chittagong Hill Tracts two years and a quarter ago, violence has claimed 40 lives in those hill districts. Of the killed were 32 tribals and eight Bengali settlers from the plainland. Most of the deaths were put down to factional fights between pro-and anti-accord groups. There have been 45 cases of abduction involving 27 tribals and the rest non-tribals. In most of the cases, the kidnappers realised ransom for the victims' release.

The level of violence is certainly much less than what we had seen in the area during the pre-accord era. For two decades that the Chittagong Hill Tracts had remained insurgency-ridden, there were countless incidents of mayhem, abduction and ransom extraction. But we should derive no consolation whatsoever from this comparative statistics of tapering violence because the fundamental question to ask is this: why after the olive branch has been spread through the historic accord should there be even a single death from either ethno-centric or factional violence?

As far as the equation between the Bengali settlers and the tribals goes, this was settled to the satisfaction of both sides by mutually agreeing to the principle of coexistence. The tribals have been given a greater weightage in the local councils to protect their own interests. But we believe the land commission should be activated to settle the land dispute as quickly as possible. Furthermore, the members of the since defunct Shanti Bahini need to be absorbed in jobs and cases against some of them withdrawn to assimilate them into the societal mainstream.

The general feeling in the area has been that the post-accord phase has brought some dividends but it certainly bears the potential for much more to come. For this to happen our suggestion has been to hold the local council election to replace the interim bodies. Meantime, of course, the PCJSS and the rest of the sagacious tribal leadership should endeavour to persuade dissenting elements among the tribal community to abide by the peace accord.

One Way Traffic

WHILE we commend the move to make some roads in the capital city one way, we cannot but be critical of the manner in which the Dhaka Metropolitan Police have gone about it. Surely, the traffic department could have made its decision public at least a week before implementation so as to give the city-dwellers some time to adjust their movement plans to the changed circumstances. On the whole, for poor execution, a very good measure has started off on a sour note.

Given the untenable proportions traffic congestion in the metropolis has assumed, the department's desperation is understandable. Our already-overburdened traffic system definitely demands drastic measures to avert a total collapse. While the number of motorised and non-motorised vehicles is constantly on the rise, we have no way of enhancing the road network. The solution lies in optimum and regulated use of the roads that we have. One-way traffic for some roads could be an effective measure in this regard. Many a big city in the world, including neighbouring Calcutta, has effectively employed this option to ease traffic congestion and there is no reason why we cannot.

However, public support and co-operation must complement any administrative measure. Here, the city-dwellers have their share of blame. Whenever a traffic regulation measure poses the slightest inconvenience, road-users, residents and businessmen cry hoarse over it. What's more, they deliberately attempt to subvert the system. Even in the roads made one way, some people force their way along the wrong side, causing trouble to others in the process. It has to stop and we must learn to endure individual inconvenience for the greater benefit of the entire citizenry.

Having said that, we would like to remind the authorities that traffic congestion needs a holistic approach, rather than piecemeal solutions, for redress. Public participation should be a major consideration in any attempt at devising such a plan. That way, while they would have a better insight into the problem, their plan would be more acceptable.

Courtney Holds Court

COURTNEY Walsh must be proud and at the same time a tired man. This charismatic Jamaican speed merchant broke the all time record of Kapil Dev for the highest number of dismissals in Test cricket at his favourite home ground Sabina Park, Kingston on Wednesday as he had Henry Olunga of Zimbabwe snapped up at short leg by teammate Wavel Hinds for his record breaking 435th victim. Courtney sprawled himself on the wicket and kissed the ground in ecstasy — a frame of mind in which he had every right to be in. When 'fiery' Freddy Trueman claimed the first 300 scalps in Test cricket he observed that anyone achieving the feat will be a 'tired person' and it goes without saying that the feat achieved by Courtney Walsh in his 114th appearance in Test cricket is a testament of his ability to perform in the highest grade of the game and a real tribute to the supreme fitness of body and mind that is essential for achieving such an unparalleled glory at the ripe age of 37 as a fast bowler.

Walsh took 17 matches less than Kapil Dev but 28 more than Sir Richard Hadlee of New Zealand, the first cricketer to achieve 400 wickets in Tests. Performance-wise also Sir Richard stands head and shoulder high above Kapil and Walsh. But then Walsh has a better performance than Kapil and Walsh has spent, so far, more than half of his life as a professional cricketer and has been richly rewarded for his sincerity, dedication, intelligence and hard work. He feels he has some more cricket left in him and we wish him all success in the days ahead and enjoy the fruits of his labour long as he can till he is overtaken by another of his kind.

NOW that the hype over the visit of President Bill Clinton has more or less subsided, it is time we picked up the threads of Indian politics. We left off when the BJP made the Gujarat government withdraw a circular to allow state public servants to join the RSS. There was also an announcement by the RSS that it was not bothered whether government employees attended its shakhas (training classes) or not.

It is obvious that the BJP could not handle the fallout from the circular in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Left to the party, it would have extended the same leeway to government employees at the Centre as Gujarat had done. The matter was reportedly discussed at a cabinet meeting informally. The opposition was stiff. Even the BJP's blind supporter, the Akali Dal from Punjab, was vehement in its criticism against the circular. That the BJP used all its resources to resist the pressure on the withdrawal of the circular was clear from the stance it took in Parliament. The two houses did not function for more than a week because of the BJP refusal to discuss the RSS issue. Still, the party stood firm. It changed its stance only when it found that its main allies, the Telugu Desam, the DMK and the Trinamool Congress, would not side with the BJP if it came to voting on the motion which the Congress had moved. The Samata Party of Socialist George Fernandes worked hard to muster support for the RSS. He even said in public that if the RSS was fascist, he too was a

Vajpayee has the knack of refurbishing his liberal image. His warning to the Sangh parivar not to cross the Lakshman Rekha may have gone home. If not, the entire edifice of the NDA may be in danger. After all, the BJP's own strength is only 182 in a 546-member Lok Sabha.

fascist. Nothing worked.

The exercise on the RSS was the BJP's maiden effort to go beyond the common agenda which debars the BJP from tinkering with personal laws and Article 370 regarding special status for Kashmir. Now the BJP is in a bind. It cannot extend to the RSS, the party's mentor, any official recognition. Still worse, if it wants to stay in power, it cannot go beyond the common agenda which its allies endorsed before the Lok Sabha election. There is yet another side to the difference. For the first time, ideological contradictions have surfaced among the NDA constituents. In the first stint of the NDA, the dictation by the AIADMK chief J. Jayalalitha was personal. Vajpayee yielded to her whims and even went to the extent of splitting the Revenue Department to give her nominee the charge of the Enforcement Directorate. No ideology was involved. This time the BJP has faced a basic and far more serious question.

Again, ideological differences seem to have appeared on the cut-back in food and fertiliser subsidies. Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha has said that there will be no roll back. The Prime Minister has supported him. Both want to follow the formula which the World

Cracks in the NDA

Bank and the IMF have indicated to New Delhi. The NDA members do not subscribe to it. The demand to continue subsidies for food and fertilisers may be met soon. Sinha has already said that the government is willing to go half way.

The BJP tries to mend the cracks within the NDA when they develop. But ideological differences have a tendency to reappear in one form or the other because they relate to

the wings, must be regretting his revolt against Sonia Gandhi. If he had only waited! The party has realised after the debacle in the assembly elections in Bihar and Orissa that Sonia Gandhi is not clicking with the masses. Most leaders in the party want her to be the president, nothing beyond. Her induction of loyalist Arjun Singh into the Rajya Sabha is an attempt to retrieve lost ground. But it may not succeed

by the RSS elements of educational, cultural and social outfits has frightened her. A few Congressmen have thrown up the name of Chandra Shekhar for the time being, until there is a consensus on someone suitable. The fault in such an arrangement is that the interim candidate indulges in all types of manoeuvres to stay put. P.V. Narasimha Rao is an example. He managed to finish the full five-year tenure.

The real point against Chandra Shekhar is that his has been the most corrupt government since independence. His claim that his government did in 40 days what others could not do in 40 years is correct, but only in respect of dishonesty. Former CBI official N.K. Singh, a man of impeccable integrity, has said in his book that Chandra Shekhar personally rang up his director to stop him (N.K. Singh) from questioning godman Chandraswami on shady deals. The person who can be an ideal choice is Chandrababu Naidu. He has already proved his mettle in Andhra Pradesh. The Congress may have reservations about him because the party's main rival in AP is the Telugu Desam. His exit will certainly make the Congress stronger in AP. Much will depend on how soon the cracks in the NDA begin to

yawn. The RSS seems to have burnt its fingers. It may not pressurise the BJP or, for that matter, Vajpayee further. Realising that L.K. Advani, much less Murli Manohar Joshi, will not be acceptable to the NDA allies, the RSS may stay content in planting its hardcore members here and there. It has been able to push several of its staunch followers in the recent Rajya Sabha election. The real decision depends on the Telugu Desam, the DMK and the Trinamool Congress. How long will they remain quiet after having noticed the methodical induction of the RSS elements into the government and the government-aided agencies is a matter of conjecture. Their faith in Vajpayee has been shaken after his statement that the RSS is a cultural organisation. But they have no separate platform. Nor have they any particular person whom they can project as Prime Minister. However disillusioned, Vajpayee is still their best bet.

On the other hand, Vajpayee has the knack of refurbishing his liberal image. His warning to the Sangh parivar not to cross the Lakshman Rekha may have gone home. If not, the entire edifice of the NDA may be in danger. After all, the BJP's own strength is only 182 in a 546-member Lok Sabha. At one time, it was taken for granted that there was no danger to the government for at least three years. Now it looks as if the guess was too optimistic.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

conviction and commitment. The chinks in the NDA armour have encouraged the Congress and it has begun to discuss the possibilities of an alternative. The party believes that Laloo Prasad Yadav from Bihar, a new ally, will come in handy. If the Telugu Desam, the DMK and the Trinamool Congress can constitute a common platform, they may not find the Congress wanting. As for the insistence on Sonia Gandhi heading a non-BJP government, the attitude now is: with Sonia Gandhi, if possible; without her, if necessary.

because the non-BJP parties do not seem to accept her as Prime Minister. Laloo, a new convert, is enthusiastic about Sonia Gandhi since she gave him support in the face of serious opposition within the party, more so in Bihar. But Sonia Gandhi is said to have herself come to the conclusion that she cannot be the Prime Minister. The Congress anxiety to find an alternative to the BJP has her blessings. She is convinced that throwing out the Vajpayee government is far more important than waiting till she or a Congressman could head the government. The systematic pene-

Sharad Pawar, waiting in

How does Our Parliament Fare?

by A Maher

In the last several months, and we may be excused for exaggerating that to a year, the seats of power have become a bit too unaccommodating for the Opposition. So the players of the 'shadow government' have left their comfy confines to take to the street. Government-opposition relations have plunged to an all-time low.

MARCH 26th beckoned the advent of yet another day for remembering the birth of a nation 29 years ago. But remembering is not only the practice of reminiscence but also of kindling the present and looking into the future. Interestingly, the structure of these periods are based on the seeds sown in the past. Bangladesh has, in all these years, tried numerous paths of development — economic, social and political — to affirm itself in the global family. But in a country of teeming millions — who lack the basic amenities of life in the first place, and with having to think of democratic practices themselves — politics is a tricky business.

The parliament is thought to be, and is vociferously emphasised to be, the focal point of all politics. The green carpet is the sacred turf of formulating laws, both moral and licit, and no man shall cross it unceremoniously. These lines are an inkling to the state of affairs in parliament that are supposed to be and the norms that govern the true institution. But recently we have begun to question the functionality of our parliament and the nature of our expectations from it. On numerous occasions we have seen major issues being brought up on the 'forum of platforms' in the presence of crowds and supporters. The topics are then discussed at length, in the same 'people-friendly' way, and then 'sent' to the parliament to be transformed into a bill and passed as law. This shows a dangerous decline in the people's confidence in the House and how they feel more comfortable in the close proximity of oratory politicians. So the House has been turned into a

transient medium of stamping approval of bills and laws.

What does the average citizen expect from the Parliament? After some deliberation of illusive answers it becomes evident that it is not an easy question to answer. As stated earlier it should be the centre-point of all issues. The social structure of Bangladesh encompasses a huge number of a rural populace; issues from outside the capital are obviously important on a national scale. But there have been murmurs of discontent among the ranks of the members of parliament (MPs) from the regional constituencies with regard to accessibility to the floor. It is common practice to cling to the sleeves of ruling party stalwarts in the House of the microphone. MPs on the wrong sides are in an even worse position. Still more discrepancies are there concerning the content of issues. Overall mismanagement in the system has probably ushered topics less fit for the attention of the Prime Minister and her Cabinet. We often see MPs bringing in 'unimportant' proposals like sanctioning of materials for a particular by-road or monetary allocations for a building in a locality. Such subjects should be made in the lower political gravities of the House and not in the limelight; glaring national issues should be the topics for debate. At this point the utilisation of time is a leading factor in efficient functioning of the parliament. It is after all the taxpayers money being spent to drive the parliamentarians to office, make them use the microphones and go through the expensive red-tape to address the agrarian brotherhood. But

does the citizenry hark at the 15,000 taka per parliament-hour expense of their incomes?

In the last several months, and we may be excused for exaggerating that to a year, the seats of power have become a bit too unaccommodating for the Opposition. So the players of the 'shadow government' have left their comfy confines to take to the street. Government-opposition relations have plunged to an all-time low. The role of accommodating the Opposition has arguably been the sole bone of contention as far as returning to the House is concerned. Here an interesting counter-argument can be posed. Is the concept of accommodating the Opposition such an extreme one, that it puts the Government solely on the negotiator's table? Why has anyone not bothered to question whether the Opposition — to any extent at that — could not be accommodating the Treasury benches? Maybe it could be dismissed as contrary to democracy; but then does democracy give room to autarchic notions, the very one that our Opposition gives to the Government with regard to bringing them back to the House?

The birthday of a nation is an occasion to celebrate. For wiser democracies it is also an occasion to analyse and evaluate the path that has been trodden to the present intersection. For a nation is always at odds on its anniversary deciding which way to proceed and then unconsciously trudging in the same earlier-decided road after apparent deliberation in an establishment called Parliament. To the political family, inept housekeeping can only lead the nation to an untidy upbringing.

To the Editor

Thank you, PM

Sir, We are very happy and commend our PM Sheikh Hasina for her bold stand regarding the export of gas. She clearly explained it to the visiting US President that our country may export power — based on natural gas but that after ensuring 50 years of reserve for our future generation. We hope and believe that the PM will not waver in her decision.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

For a system

Sir, Mr Sirajul Alam Khan's proposals (Daily Star, 12-March-2000) for an in-depth re-examination of the country's governing system is welcome. At the dawn of 21st Century, the people of Bangladesh deserve better than what they currently have. The essence of Mr Khan's proposals, as I see them, is that Bangladesh needs to institute a system in which political power will be subject to real checks and balances. This is the basic tenet of modern political democracy, most extensively codified in the American Constitution. But the originality of Mr Khan's thinking is that he does not advocate a simple copying of the American or any other constitution's provisions but he tries to adapt these principles to the particular needs and level of development of Bangladesh today.

An example of his fresh lat-

eral thinking is the call for a bicameral legislature, in which the Lower House remains the preserve of full-time politicians but this is balanced by an Upper House made up of representatives of the professional classes and civil society in general. Furthermore, he proposes a permanent government of national unity in which cabinet positions are given out in proportion to each political party's demonstrated electoral strength. Another is decentralisation of power as far as possible. These are initial ideas and Mr Khan would surely welcome any kind of input from all interested persons in a process of consultation.

Mr Sirajul Alam Khan has taken the initiative to start the debate. It is important now for everybody to join in a broad based consensus for a constitutional reform. Let us devote all our creative energies to this important task.

Salahuddin Imam Dhaka

For political stability

Sir, We are concerned about the political unrest in the country. It is creating a lot of problems for the people. However, experts have suggested ways to solve the existing political stalemate. As an ordinary citizen of the land, I would also like to suggest some for creating political stability in the coun-

try. It is observed that political parties are not comfortable to remain in the opposition. That is why they always raise issues just for opposing the government, which creates political unrest in the country. Therefore, the tenure of government may be reduced.

It has become a tradition to raise questions by the opposition parties over the fairness of the conducting elections. So, every election should be held under a caretaker government. Necessary laws have to be enacted for it. This will help not only to remove question marks on the acceptability of elections but also save huge amount of money spent to conduct these elections. It is worthwhile to mention that the Philippines is planning to hold all the elections (local bodies and national bodies) at a time.

Unhealthy political culture like hartals, road blockage, damages of vehicles etc. may be removed on a consensus basis. Government has unilaterally declared that Awami League would not call any hartals in future even if they were in the opposition. This declaration could not minimise the harm of the people since the opposition has put a question mark on the reliability of the declaration. So, laws should be enacted to ban hartals, road blockage, damages of vehicles and the like.

M Rahman Tarun 38/1 Ditu Road, New Eskaton, Dhaka-1000

OPINION

The Philosophical Approach in Politics

Abul M Ahmed

The level of politics in Dhaka is passing through the phase of nuts-and-bolts stage. The perspective approach is yet to arrive. The philosophical vision, as employed by leaders like Lee Kwan, Nehru and de Gaulle, is yet to be served to the citizens of Bangladesh. First the approach, then the detail.

The evolving political parties are still seeking stable platforms, resulting in a subjective approach to the political problems of the nations. Politics is a practical administrative mechanism to reach the noble goals of life. Now it is all in the mending stage of repair and consolidation, due to the heterogeneous past (history has its reasons to explain the passing phases). The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle have to be pieced together to present a neutral perspective for evaluation by the thinkers who are other than politicians.

Today the politicians are in the limelight during the post-revolution construction stage. Sooner or later the politicians must provide windows and space for others to contribute. At present there is no variety in political sensibilities. Such usurpation of the ventilating platform by the political leaders may provide a distorted view of the state of the nation.

History has to be appraised in the correct perspective by the new and future generations. Unfortunately even the writing of history of Bangladesh is not

completed yet after three or four decades. This unfinished task needs consensus for completion; but the political dust is not settling down. The price has to be paid for keeping national assignments pending and unfinished. Continued political instability exacts a heavy invisible toll.

Today bi-polar politics by the two major political parties has introduced an element of boredom as the scene, and the approach and arguments are not changing (to rise above the occasion). Beliefs need not be polarised, but the same have to be tempered. There is an embedded weakness in the followers of past charismatic leadership — strength which is not generated by the self. What we are witnessing today is clutch-politics, depending on past support.

The transfer of right political motivation to the new generation is an obligation which needs delicate approach, leaving no room for misguidance. The various sources for the corrective inputs must be open, and welcomed, to create an amiable platform for national consensus. This task needs tolerance and patience, which are in short supply today. What comes through two earlier stages, one in the pantry, and the other in the kitchen. The latter two work places are not shown to the dining guests; although the

proof of the pudding lies in the eating. The laundry has to be washed and ironed, and dirty linen is not displayed in public. What stage have we reached today?

We are still in the sorting and cleaning state. Too much political garbage has accumulated, which has to be disposed of. It is not difficult, realising that this garbage is not radioactive material. But the reactive politics of today has made the situation artificially radioactive. There are two main types of politics: the politics of the head, and the politics of the heart. Passions rise high in politics and religion, and in the other affairs of the heart. We have to rise one step upwards, to the level of the head, before cool sanity will return to the political arena. At the present moment, it looks like the sadistic gladiators' show we see on the TV screen. The latter is for fund and entertainment, not for leading the citizens and to run a country.

Politics has to come down to a routine level, before the network of the political system will work 'normally' (the term 'normal' is widely used in Dhaka at different levels of the society, to mean a large number of different situations, as the readers are familiar with). We come back to another popular term, 'systems loss'. We accuse the bureaucracy and the electric power sectors, but the political masters have to show the way.

What Type of University should we be in for the 21st Century?

Shahryar Feroze and Rejwanul Alam

It requires no illustration to clarify that advancement in education sector is the pressing need of the hour especially for the third world countries. This condition is much more acute in Bangladesh at the present time. Once government universities were held in high repute, taking pride in highly distinguished faculty members. But things have changed for the worse since then and the situation now is far from satisfactory. To satisfy the demand for quality education, private universities, since 1993, have been providing the right faculty members and congenial educational atmosphere. We now have a number of quality private educational institutions to choose from. This is, however, not a pointed tendency of disparaging government institutions but rather an unreserved effort to depict the reality.

Now let's focus on the academic calendar of government universities. The pages of the calendar are found dotted with holidays, both scheduled and unscheduled. We all know about the prolonged Eid vacations and similar other scheduled holidays in government universities. Moreover, 'hartal' of political unrest, gunfight over control of residential halls etc., result in cancellation of classes and die (unscheduled holidays). Recently, sexual harassment of female students has taken a turn for the worse causing quite a number of rapes in a government university. Government universities have been thoroughly unsuccessful in curbing violence on campus. Student politics is one of the dominant features of all government universities. Under the protection of armed cadres, political leaders and workers can do almost whatever they want to.

In marked contrast, private universities are committed to imparting quality higher education in Bangladesh through teaching, training, research and public service with a view to helping individuals increase their intellectual, social and personal potential so as to enable them to actively participate in the socio-economic development of the nation. Backed by eminent Board of Directors and top-notch faculty members, private universities are dedicated to inculcating improved ways of thinking into

Basic' as a 100 level course in keeping with the market demand, whereas the view is absolutely different in most government universities. In many liberal arts courses, the syllabuses are not up to the mark to meet the challenges of the new millennium. More or less, the same deficiencies characterize commerce and business courses.

Graduates can expect to find high paying jobs in a very competitive job market, especially in private companies, private banks and multi-national companies etc., thanks to the excellent syllabus, busy academic calendar and superb teaching method. If we take a closer look at the syllabuses of private universities, the difference with those of public universities will be manifest. Private universities are committed to highest academic standards to prepare its graduates who are expected to fill positions of leadership in government and private organizations. These academic standards are maintained through identification and recruitment of faculty members based upon evidence of their excellence in teaching abroad and also at home, and excellence in research. Through developing and maintaining a modern well-designed curricula and utilization of well-equipped computer labs and well-stocked libraries, private universities provide their students with state-of-the-art learning experiences throughout their years at college.

Although the fact remains that private universities are relatively more expensive to attend, those who can afford to pay seriously consider education in a private university as they think it to be wise investment that should pay rich dividends in the future.