

Reopen Shahjalal Varsity

PRESIDENT Shahabuddin Ahmed has made some difference in the persistently bleak Shahjalal University situation. He has kindled a hope for the reopening of the long bedevilled institution. Under his persuasion the students have given up their fast-unto-death programme keeping faith with his assurance that the university syndicate would meet on May 6 to devise ways for an early resumption of classes. He has promised that as chancellor of the university, he might even visit Sylhet, if felt necessary on that day, obviously as part of the facilitatory role he has embraced of his own accord. He has made it clear though, that the decision has to come from the Syndicate and not imposed from the top as required by the autonomous status of the university.

This brings us to the crux of the matter relating to the genesis and snowballing of the tempest at Shahjalal University. It is the syndicate whose decision to name certain dormitories and buildings of the university after a select group of celebrities drew opposition from others who suggested names of their own liking to be used. The polarisation was based on the customary notion of the political divide between 'pro-and anti-liberation forces'.

Any serious attempt to reopen the university is certain to entail an acknowledgment of the naming controversy as a pragmatic necessity. At the same time we must also recognise the latest burst of student, parental, public and civil society unanimity that Shahjalal University should be reopened at the earliest without any ado. So, we have the makings of a solution there.

We have a three-point formula to offer by way of ending the stalemate: one, the syndicate of Shahjalal University reiterates its earlier decision to postpone the naming of the academic halls and buildings; two, convenes a meeting or meetings with the representatives of all those people who oppose the names that the syndicate had put forward to arrive at an amicable settlement of the question; and three, as the process gets underway the university is declared reopened. There is no reason why the functioning of the university should be held ransom to bunker mentality any more.

May Day Thoughts

A few seminars and symposia here and there, special supplements in the print media and special programmes on the television and radio... that's what remembrance of the historic event at a Chicago cattle market last century has been all about. Essentially, the fate of the workers around the world, especially in the developing countries like ours, has remained unchanged. Exploitation of employees has not stopped at all; the means of oppression has only changed. Unfortunately still, people entrusted with the responsibility of protecting and promoting their rights, the labour union leaders, have themselves become part of the unhealthy nexus, compromising workers' interest for their personal gains. While the labourers bear the brunt of oppression, at work and during movement for improvement of their lot, the so-called trade union leaders fatten their wallets.

In our context, trade unionism has assumed evil proportions. Over the years, politicisation, and subsequent criminalisation, have rendered the unions, especially at the state-run commercial and industrial concerns, a coterie of crooks. Dominated by criminal elements, these workers' bodies have been used as a blanket for anti-social activities. Vested interest groups have made merry of the self-seeking and corrupt leaders while the fate of the general workers has gone from bad to worse. These enterprises have progressively lost productivity, an inevitable consequence of recruitment of incompetent hands on partisan and favouritist considerations, to eventually become a huge liability on the state exchequer. Adamjee Jute Mills Limited is the obvious example in this regard.

May Day comes again, therefore, as a reminder that the workers still remain exploited by the employers, and the labour leaders alike. They must be helped towards getting themselves free from the shackles and the onus rests on all of us, the government, entrepreneurs, members of the civil society to ensure the same. Workers deprived of their rights invariably account for low productivity and, in the long run, an ailing economy. Let us dedicate ourselves to protecting and promoting the interest of the workers. That is what we owe them.

What a Feast!

PEOPLE of Khulna have never seen the like of it before: a wedding reception being held at Khulna Stadium under a huge shamiana (canopy). This most lavish reception took place on Saturday with invitation cards having been distributed in the whole of the preceding month to about 15 thousand guests. Several political leaders attended the reception.

A delicious mughlai dish of kachchi bhortani was served for the palate of guests with 100 maunds of mutton and 50 maunds of the finest variety of Basmati rice going into it. Of course, there were other dishes, equally costly and tasty followed by desert. All these elaborate and costly arrangements were made by a Whip of the ruling party, Mostafa Rashid Suja, on the occasion of the wedding of his daughter Shilpi, according to a report in Prothom Alo on Sunday.

Of late, such extravagant arrangements for marriages or social parties have become a common phenomenon with a somewhat adverse demonstrative effect on public psyche. But does the government accord due permission under the guest control act or receive the fees for entertaining guests beyond the maximum limit of one hundred. We believe the Finance Ministry and the Board of Revenue have a job cut out for them. Let's not compete with some regional figures whose prodigality made news headlines in the not too distant past. All citizens have a right to hold social functions but within the purview of the law of the land.

LAST year in Kargil Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, India's Prime Minister, felt betrayed and Pakistan military humiliated — betrayed because only a month before he, together with Mr Nawaz Sharif, initiated a peace process at Lahore and, humiliated because an imposed ceasefire compelled it to retreat from Kargil. Both the senses of betrayal and humiliation have since been stoking the fire of further conflict between the two countries. Pakistan always sought to change the status quo in Kashmir and it could be done only through military actions. Now some Indian leaders and defence experts are also openly talking about introducing geo-strategic changes in the region through war. Indian Chief of Army Staff General V S Malik warned that his forces might cross the line of control and even resort to a limited war. Mr Vajpayee himself threatened to occupy Pakistani part of Kashmir. Coming close to its heels there is a sharp rise of 28.2 per cent in India's defence budget which has been termed 'anti-poor' by the critics. But as the war hysteria is kept alive by the country's Hindu right, the votaries of public welfare are a voice crying in wilderness. With an ominous military build up under way a fresh conflagration sweeps the region. The war clouds that gathered over the subcontinent in the wake of Kargil war last summer appear to have darkened.

Since January last when the first serious border clash in post Kargil phase broke out in Chamb between India and Pakistan both have been pursuing a dangerous path of upping the ante in a series of exchanges along the line of control. Nobody knows when one such venture would spiral out of control to spark off bigger conflagration engulfing the region in its flame. India, more aggrieved by constant pinpricks of Pakistan's 'proxy war' in Kashmir and bent upon teaching the 'intruders' a befitting lesson precisely aimed at provoking a violent conflict from one of these clashes. When its troops penetrated deep into Lanjot in Azad Kashmir on 24 February killing and mutilating 14 people including women and children, it could not have any military purpose other than provocation. The Pakistani retaliation followed when Indian soldiers were killed in an ambush on an Indian post. One year after much touted Lahore Declaration, which promised the revival of a peace effort between India and Pakistan, the relations between the two have plunged to an all time low.

General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's chief executive faced with the prospect of an impending war has already warned that his country could use nuclear weapons if its security is threatened. Indeed, a weaker Pakistan when confronted with India's superior conventional forces and weapons would instinctively resort to nuclear strike for its survival. Pakistan officials foresee strong prospect of an Indian military offensive both across the line of control and international boundary by the onset of the summer. With timely intervention by concerned quarters. Rejecting Islamabad's formal offer for the renewal of negotiation, coming in the wake of Musharraf's pronouncement that he was prepared to talk to "anyone, anytime, any place" the Indians have practically shut the door on President Clinton's suggestion for the resumption of Lahore Peace Process. They, on the other hand insist on India's precondition of an end to "cross border terrorism" — an unattainable goal steeped in deep controversy. In the mean time, Indians are using to their advantage, Pakistan's current diplomatic isolation. The BJP which leads the ruling coalition in India is supposedly a communal chauvinistic outfit and militarism is the part of its political philosophy. While the BJP's coalition partners are preoccupied with squabbling over their shares in current political dispensation, the Sangh Parivar has indeed a field day

Flirting with Dangerous Illusions

Most defence observers believe that fresh hostilities may erupt during the next month when snow would start melting in the Himalayas making it possible to intrude into the Kashmir valleys. It would exacerbate situation on the line of control where the two forces are positioned eyeball to eyeball. The overwhelming dangers are the chances of the conflict assuming its nuclear dimension.



PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

both countries equipped with nuclear weapons any military adventure by any of these countries may have far greater and deadlier consequence than it can be anticipated. That India also is prepared for such eventuality is evident from its nuclear doctrine which envisages building and deployment of nuclear weapons. Some of the BJP leaders have also been openly brandishing it.

The situation could not be more delicate in the past because now there is no contact at any official level so that the tensions are diffused with

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promoting jingoism and religious frenzy.

Meanwhile, even the verbal exchanges between the two are menacing. Defence Minister, George Fernandes on January 24 propounded a whole new doctrine of war — the limited war. At a strategic studies conference in New Delhi he exhorted Pakistan to grasp "the real meaning of nuclearisation". He boasted that, like in Kargil, India can engage Pakistan in a conventional war at any place and time chosen by the latter and win it. Pakistan too intensified its nuclear rhetoric. On February 3 it announced that it had set up a National Command Authority to create command and control mechanisms for its nuclear weapons and missiles. The Authority was also entrusted with the responsibility for the control and employment of strategic nuclear forces and organisations. It was response of sorts to India's nuclear doctrine and a reminder that Pakistan was not sitting idle on nuclear front.

The Indian 'answer' followed in three days when on February 6 none other than Mr Vajpayee himself thundered at Jullundur: Pakistan is threatening nuclear war, but do they even know what it means? He himself

gives an answer when he said even more menacingly that India would not be the first to use nuclear weapons. "But if anyone uses them against us, anyone threatens us, we will not wait for our annihilation..." Given this backdrop the nuclear danger in South Asia is very real. Both the nuclear arch rivals in the region are extraordinarily volatile and vulnerable to a number of bilateral and domestic factors including fast changing political moods, politico-religious movements, ever worsening low-intensity conflicts in Kashmir, and generalised diplomatic rivalry.

As a result, the chances of an accidental, unintended, unauthorised and even sheer impulsive use of nuclear weapons in South Asia are grave. There is hardly any strategic distance between India and Pakistan. Missile flight time between them can be as little as three minutes — too little for crisis defusion. Most defence observers believe that fresh hostilities may erupt during the next month when snow would start melting in the Himalayas making it possible to intrude into the Kashmir valleys. It would exacerbate situation on the line of control where the two forces are positioned eyeball to eyeball. The overwhelming dangers are the chances of the conflict assuming its nuclear dimension when even a border clash can lead up a nuclear holocaust. Worse still, there exists no more a buffer of a third party mediation or its prospects between them.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Out of Control Cuban-Americans!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

The Cuban-Americans are an intolerable lot. The demonstrators in front of Lazaro Gonzalez's house waived only Cuban flags. Actually there was one American flag, with the stars upside down! When two American women held up two posters praising Janet Reno, the Cuban-American demonstrators beat them up. If the Cuban-Americans are so fond of Cuba, perhaps they should relocate there!

ami to plead with the relatives to turn over the boy. The relatives would not budge. They would not turn over the boy voluntarily, they stressed. The court-ordered time to turn over the boy came and went.

By this time the father had been in the US for three weeks, without seeing his son. He pleaded with American public to facilitate the return of his son to him. Juan Miguel Gonzalez, the father, even promised the INS that he would stay in America until or beyond May 11, when the relatives-engineered court hearing for Elan's asylum in the US is scheduled. Juan Miguel Gonzalez complained to the Press that his Miami relatives were offering him millions of dollars, unsuccessfully thus far, to defect to the US.

The signs coming out of Little Havana were ominous. Suddenly the relatives began bad-mouthing Juan-Miguel Gonzalez as a wife-beating, abusive father — without a shred of evidence. The last straw was the release of a "hostage video tape" by the relatives, in which a coached Elan, wagging his finger was heard to lecture his father that he did not want to go back to Cuba. The father was alarmed. "They are torturing my son; please help him," he pleaded with Attorney General Janet Reno.

This time the Attorney General acted. She sent in armed INS agents in the dawn hours of Sunday, April 23, to rescue the boy. The operation took only three minutes. The relatives, too, were ready. They hid in the house an Associate Press photographer named Diaz, a Hispanic, to take photographs of the INS agents in action. His photo of an armed INS agent snatching the boy away from the clutches of one of the fishermen who rescued Elan, was flashed across the front page of newspapers all over the world.

The INS had prepared meticulously for the operation. The house where Elan was staying was under 24-hour surveillance. Agents studied the crowd, their number at different times of the day and night, their disposition and whether they were armed. The time chosen was around five in the morning. At this hour most people are deep in sleep; those who did not sleep all night cannot fight it any longer. People are lethargic and slow to react. Armed with a search warrant the agents

knocked on the door, introduced themselves and waited fruitlessly for thirty seconds before bursting in. The agents' threatening outfit, robust shouting and quick action stunned and intimidated everyone around. The raid was over, successfully and quickly, without any injury to anyone. A poll showed that 60 per cent of Americans supported the forcible removal of Elan.

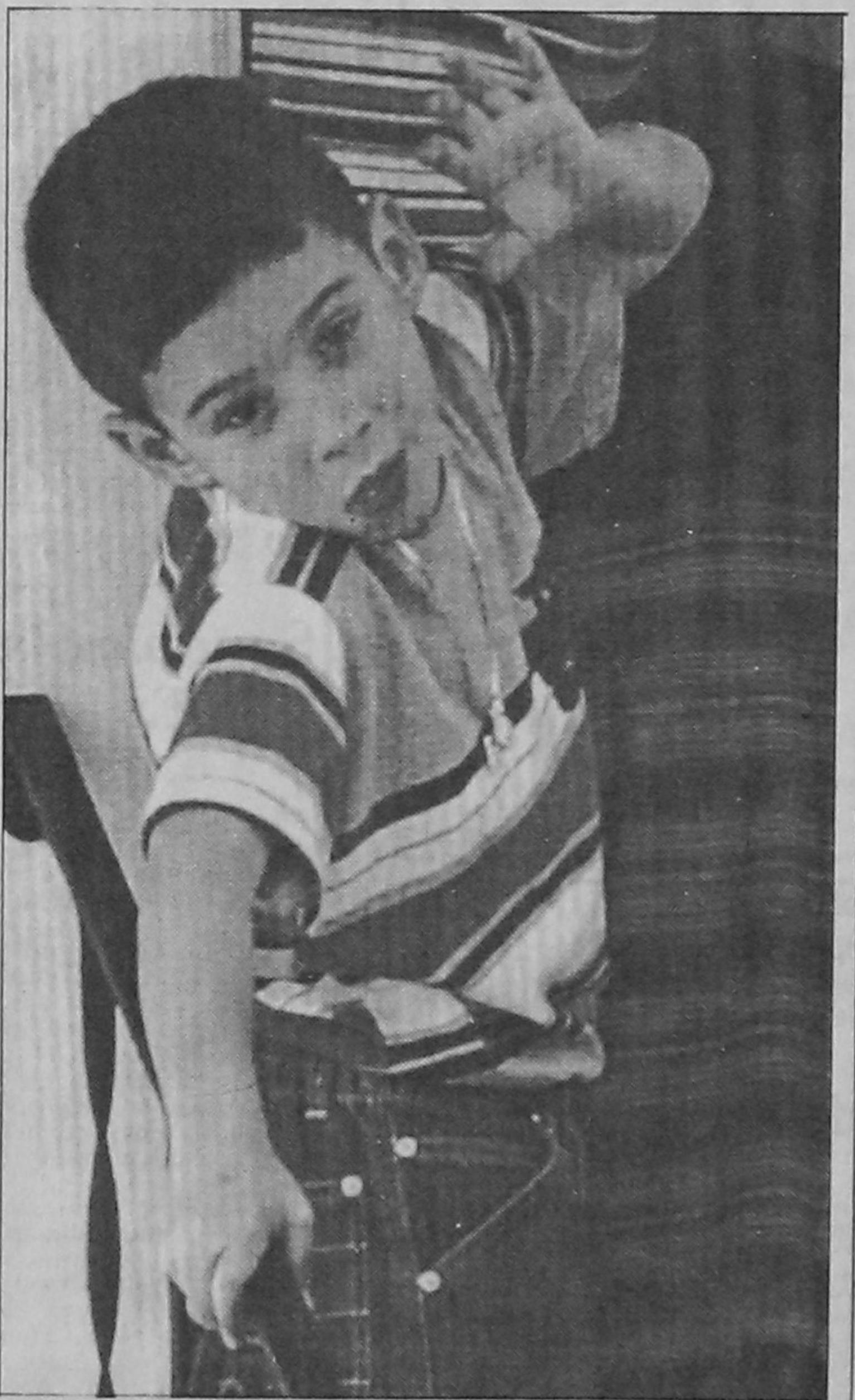
Elan was whisked away from the house in the arms of a female agent who spoke Spanish, reassuring Elan in Spanish not to be afraid because he was going to meet with his Papa. After a 90-minute plane ride in an INS plane, Elan was reunited with his Papa at Andrews Air Force base outside Washington, DC where the family is to stay for a few days before relocating at the Wye River Plantation, in Maryland, the site of the 1998 Mid-East Peace Conference. To counteract AP photographer Diaz's unflattering portrayal of a frightened Elan, the real family-released photographs of Elan beaming in his father's arms. Both the photographs made the front

pages, each cancelling the effect of the other. Immediately after Elan's rescue, the Miami relatives too flew to Washington, DC and accompanied by a Republican Senator went to the Andrews Air Force Base and demanded to see the boy. They were turned away. They tried again on Sunday; again they were turned away. It is now up to Juan Miguel Gonzalez to decide who sees his son. He has to be insane to let the Miami Mafia into his house.

Having lost their prize, the relatives and the Cuban-American community cried foul. For political expediency shameless Republican politicians joined the chorus of condemnation of INS, Janet Reno and President Clinton. These are the same Republicans who supposedly favour of law and order, now siding with people who have broken the law. These are Republicans who espouse family values, yet favour the relatives' rights over a father's. Instead of making sure that Lazaro Gonzalez, the chief lawbreaker, is in jail for contempt of court, the Republican Senators are hobnobbing with him.

The truth is only two persons acted honourably in this episode: Attorney General Janet Reno, who upheld the law, and President Clinton who backed her and was profuse in her praise.

It appears that there are two sets of laws in America: one for Cuban-Americans, another for ordinary Americans. If there is one criticism one can level against the Attorney General it is that she had been too soft towards the Cuban-American



community. The patriotism of the Cuban-Americans has to be questioned. Every Cuban-American of any consequence, from New Jersey Congressman Menendez to the mayor of Miami, came down solidly in favour of the lawbreakers. In fact, the Mayor of Miami and Dade County had threatened that if there were any federal attempt to take Elan by force, the local police would not cooperate. They did not.

The Cuban-Americans are a pampered lot. They believe that as long as Fidel Castro is in power, every Cuban has a right to enter the US, legally or illegally. Let's we forget, Elan is in the US illegally. African-Americans are quick to point out that if Elan was black (he is white) and from Haiti, he would have been dispatched back immediately without much fanfare. Lazaro Gonzalez, Elan's great uncle, at whose house Elan lived the last five months, and who is the chief conspirator against the US justice, has not bothered to learn English after spending God knows how many years in the US!

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Singer Gloria Estefan of Miami Sound Machine, who was born in Cuba and is a supporter of Elan's Miami relatives, recently complained that Americans do not really understand Cuban-Americans. Actually they do. Gloria, Americans have just seen that the Cuban-Americans believe that their blind hatred of Fidel Castro entitles them to break the laws of the United States. By trampling over the rights of others, in this case a father, the Cuban-Americans have vividly demonstrated that they are no different than but are mirror images of, Fidel Castro's Cuba!

OPINION

Reflections on May Day

Abu Imran

The first of May every year is celebrated with due solemnity as a day to honour the dignity of labour and to ensure that the workers and wage earners have unhindered rights to regulated working hours, compensation, benefits etc. The right of workers was recognised after a lot of blood and tears were shed by the exploited and humiliated workers more than a century ago.

The event of May 1, 1886 in Chicago was epoch making in sacrifice and at least formally it did away with exploitation of labour, and some sort of discipline was brought in and to that extent the working class people were benefited. But still there is a long way to go in realising the real rights of the working class people particularly for those who are in the third world countries. Here, despite the convention, book-rights, exploitation still persists in actualities. There are in existence such situations as child labour, discrimination in wages of male and female, inadequate wages, unregulated working hours, no job guarantee, adverse working condition etc. These exist perhaps in a greater degree in private sector. But this does not mean that public sector is free from lapses. There too injustices are done particularly in matters of promotions and career prospects. These irregular practices are followed and even arbitrary conditions imposed to allow benefit to chiefs depriving the genuine seniors.

It often appears to be a paradox that while on the one hand May Day is observed upholding the rights of working class people to adequate wages and improved working condition, on the other their very rights are grossly violated as noted above. Why it's so is a valid question. The simple answer perhaps is that whatever rights were allowed, were done so under compulsion and not by option recognising the right itself. Hence wherever, and whenever, there occurs a scope, the labour or the working class people are exploited, and pushed to the wall the workers often revolt.

The rights of workers are recognised in our religion Islam, too, and it is advised that they should be fairly and humanely treated. Not only this but all honest labour was considered dignified. And people were encouraged to earn their livelihood through labour. In Islam the employers are asked to pay the worker before his sweat has dried up. An exploitation is so discouraged that even the owner of a camel is advised not to overburden it. The Prophet (PBUH) said that the workers and employees should be humanely treated. In Islam the concept of master-slave relationship has been discouraged. There is a saying of the holy prophet — "Those who work under us are our brothers. Give them what you yourselves eat and wear."

If these are followed properly, the problem relating to violation of workers' right would be substantially minimised. This is the May Day observance which has the objectives of securing and protecting rights of the workers and wage earners.

To the Editor ...

Hartal and Bangladesh

Sir, For the past four years, I have tried to read The Daily Star at least weekly if not daily to know what is happening in Bangladesh. I enjoy this daily and especially all of the news that is provided by the editors. I must admit that I am very much concerned with the constant hartal and strikes declared against the country and the people. I love Bangladesh and especially the people who make up this great country. I pray constantly that God will make some radical financial differences for every men and women of this beautiful country. The strikes and hartals are costing so much to the poor and this must be stopped or at least bargained with.

Why persecute everyone for the benefit of so few? Bill Hermlinger, Dayton Ohio, USA

Quo vadis, politicians?

Sir, All ruling regimes unleash their private agenda before leaving office, on the eve of the next elections; paving the way for environmental support during the days ahead. In Dhaka, it is no different. First the SPA — 2000 (an exercise in futility, due to over-dose), then blowing hot over the judiciary tardiness in disposing off cases of interest to the party, which might linger longer when not in power.

The politics of the student fronts in the universities have their other side of the coin; and the session jams are jammed between political interests. There is no limit to the politicisation of the established institutions; and the civil service, the trade and service unions are openly split into two main factions, with the third faction making its presence felt (one

Two-stroke masterstroke

Sir, Notice the slogan: "Exchange your 2-stroke engine for a new 4-stroke engine" (under certain subsidised terms and conditions, with tie-up with a financial agency). This is a well-known market strategy (HP system) which may be employed by the importers and distributors of 4-stroke engines for auto-riders. To successfully get rid of the polluting 2-stroke engines; working on a scheme in coordination with government policy, and UN assistance. This way, in one stroke, the offending 2-stroke engines will disappear as if by magic and the 4-stroke engine importers will make a fortune! AZ Dhaka

Quo vadis, politicians?

A Husnain Dhaka

based on the politics of religion). What is more disturbing at the higher levels is that the communication gap between the President of the country and the politicians which is showing no sign of narrowing. They talk on different wavelengths to the same audience (the public), and the latter is trapped between the deep sea and the devil (more than once in our short history). Surely, the political approach is not the panacea for all the accumulated and new illnesses; but, in the developing countries, who can get out of the clutches of the bizarre politics displayed by our leader.