

AL Should Not Taunt, but Welcome BNP to Sangsad

EVERYTIME that a sign of normality starts peeping through the thickening clouds of confrontational politics one or the other top-end ruling party enthusiast spoils it all with abominable, even blood-curdling remarks against political opponents. Not only would these comments be directed towards where it hurts most, but as if itching to upset the apperant these would also be patently misplaced and mistimed. This is disgusting.

Let's just recall what Sajeda Chowdhury, the Forest and Environment Minister and AL President member, spewed out against the opposition on Sunday on the heels of the latter's decision to attend the JS session. She raised a question on the floor of the House which by its very phraseology sounded obnoxious even to the reader, let alone to those against whom it was hurled. She asked, is the opposition coming to the parliament to save their red passports, other perks and privileges that go with their JS seats?

This is just not said when all eyes are expectantly focused on the likelihood of the opposition breaking their boycott of parliament. Why should politicians be so impolitic? But then came Sajeda's opening of the whole wardrobe of what she definitely considered as bad laundry. Apparently in reaction to Khaleda's recent observation that all corrupt AL men will be tried after the fall of that party from power Sajeda berated that in matters of corruption Begum Zia, her party and her family are known 'champions' in the eye of people. She wanted her to return 'property worth Tk 50 crore' her family held in possession since the assassination of President Zia.

We think these taunts had better be avoided. The fact of the matter is, the BNP and its alliance partners have, by deciding to retain membership of the parliament, saved the country's politics from being thrown off-gear. Imagine the chaos and uncertainty that would creep in following the staging of wholesale by-elections in the event that the opposition had opted for giving up their parliament seats altogether.

We reiterate that BNP returning to the parliament just to retain its seats is not only immoral but also self-defeating. There is a far greater purpose for which it should return and that is to reclaim its position as the nation's voice in the opposition.

PARC Reads it Right

THE Public Administration Reforms Commission (PARC) has diagnosed rightly that inter-cadre rivalry and overzealous welfare associations are major impediments to any smooth functioning of the government. Especially, rivalry amongst different civil service cadres has indeed assumed disturbing and, in some cases, embarrassing proportions. Late last year, this paper carried a report (*Overseas missions: JS body sees lack of co-ordination among officials; December 1, 1999*) on how inter-cadre antagonism hampers the activities of the Bangladeshi missions abroad. In a subsequent editorial (*Retarded Diplomacy; December 2, 1999*), we commended the parliamentary standing committee's (on foreign affairs) findings and called for eradication of the "undesirable inter-cadre rivalry" for an efficient civil service. The phenomenon is even more widespread on the domestic front. To top it off, there has been a blatant politicisation of the civil service over the years. Recently, a Bengali daily reported that some 150 senior civil servants had been designated as Officers on Special Duty for one to eight years largely on political consideration. Welfare associations, too, have a tendency to act like trade unions. Here again, the division thrives solely on political, not professional, interest.

Any thought on reforms should, therefore, aim at eliminating these factors which tend to corrode professionalism. However potent the PARC recommendations, to be submitted to the prime minister by the end of this month, might sound, these would be of no consequence if not immediately acted upon.

As we have repeatedly said, political convergence of opinion is central to implementing reforms in administration. We would very much like the prime minister to forward the PARC proposals to the parliament for deliberation. There, with opposition participating, a bipartisan resolution to push through the changes can be adopted. With that kind of political will behind the task it will be easy to have the bureaucracy fall in line. And also with a depoliticisation of the issue, introduction of a uniform performance evaluation system would be much easier which, in turn, would dispel bickering over cadre-oriented promotions and eventually remove inter-cadre tension.

Depriving Growers

DEPRIVING the growers of their legitimate earnings has been a practice from time immemorial. But the modern day techniques have surpassed all methods of the past. There were times when the farmers themselves took their produce to the local 'hats' or markets themselves and sold them to the wholesalers or retailers. Sometimes the growers sold their produce directly. Enter the middlemen and we see a completely different picture. These people, with no financial investment control the market nevertheless by virtue of their smartness, intelligence and capacity to influence the normally docile and peace-loving farmers. These days they are joined by touts, musclemen and of course the so-called guardians of law. Together they have been controlling the entire marketing system of the country. The results have been endless woes for the farmers and the consumers alike.

A report in The Daily Star on Monday vividly depicted a sorry tale of merchandise reaching the city markets from the outstation bazars. Buyers at the city's retail outlets are made to pay double, and in some cases more than double the price for these vegetables at the growers' level. But none of the high profit goes to the growers this having been siphoned off by middlemen, mastaans and wayward policemen. The result is obvious: the farmers suffer for no fault of theirs and the consumers do not get the satisfaction of helping the farmers. Unless the brokerage, toll and exorbitant transport charges are eliminated, neither the grower nor the consumer will have any relief from the clutches of the middlemen and touts.

The Tipping Point in Bangladesh

by Khurshid Hamid

The civil society in Bangladesh is non-plussed and aghast at the political, economic and societal imbroglio prevailing in the country, and are spider stung into inaction. The conscientious citizenry should find solace in Gladwell's conclusion in his book: "Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push—in just the right place—it can be tipped."

thought of or dreamt about banks or NGOs at the time. How were they nevertheless so overwhelmingly successful in their efforts, against all heavy and impossible odds, and achieved glory and renown, perhaps far beyond their personal wildest dreams?

The conundrum had always puzzled me, till I came across Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. In his book, which grew out of an article he wrote for *The New Yorker*, he proposes a fascinating and possibly useful theory for our nation of Bangladesh (and therefore I choose to dilate upon it): Ideas, attitudes and behaviours tend to spread contagiously in the same way as some infectious diseases. Analyzing how his epidemics work, he concludes that they "are a function of the people who transmit infectious agents, the infectious agent itself and the environment in which the infectious agent is operating."

Analysing these three elements, he arrives at what he calls "The Law of the Few," "The Stickiness Factor" and "The Power of Context." The Law of the Few holds that only certain

kinds of people can transmit effectively. These are Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen. For instance, I would suggest that Mohammed Yunus and F.H. Abed were separately all three rolled into one: Yunus/Abed knew what the poor in Bangladesh were about and up to (Mavens), they knew the right people to tell (Connectors), and they knew how to tell them effectively (Salesmen).

But also their messages were inherently important, which means it had a high Stickiness Factor. And it prompted an effective reaction, which suggests a strong Power of Context. Under these perfect circumstances Yunus/Abed's words spread contagiously. It tipped the balance of donor and governmental behaviour, and the donors came marching by with increasing largesse and more reluctantly the government accepted them into their embrace.

Gladwell's classic for instance in this regard was Paul Revere and his famous horse-ride into Lexington to warn the American revolutionaries that the British redcoats were coming.

Gladwell's theories boiled

down to their essence in the foregoing all the same are powerful in their implications. Correctly applied they could be used to run businesses more effectively, to implement projects with runaway efficiency, to cauterize the cancer of corruption in politics and business, to weed out terrorism and lawlessness, to guide our political leaders towards moderation, tolerance and *siratul mustakim*—in fine and perhaps most important, to alter human behaviour.

And what sort of behaviour do we have in mind? Although Gladwell is coy about it, a particularly startling conclusion in his dissertation is that crime itself might be eliminated as a problem. Taking Gladwell's theory of context, and using what criminologists have called the Broken Windows theory, by putting behind bars some petty criminals and some mastaans and eliminating other minor blights on the quality of life in the country would inevitably be followed by a major drop in crime statistics. This is exactly what happened in the successful New York City police campaign, which catapulted Mayor Rudolph Giuliani into fame or

notoriety depending on the colour of your skin, and which Gladwell cites as for instance, which his book is amply garnished with. Gladwell himself aims the fire of his powerful theories on the phenomenon of teenage smoking, which he says is proving completely resistant to present scare tactics and should instead be attacked by lowering the nicotine content of cigarettes (or reducing their stickiness, so to speak).

The civil society in Bangladesh is non-plussed and aghast at the political, economic and societal imbroglio prevailing in the country, and are spider stung into inaction. The conscientious citizenry should find solace in Gladwell's conclusion in his book: "Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push—in just the right place—it can be tipped." If nothing else, he entertains you by describing new places you might stand to gain some leverage on what you want to tip.

Let this article be a clarion call to those blessed few, the Connectors and Salesmen—to stand up, be counted, and set their strategic places for that ever so minor push, which would become a shove, and lead to an overwhelming tip towards sweetness and light in our society.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy and Switzerland

Friend and All-weather Friend

When China has not officially accepted Sikkim's integration with India, nor the hold over Arunachal and some parts of Assam, why should New Delhi keep quiet on Tibet? The Dalai Lama wants only an autonomous status within China. India is unnecessarily on the defensive.

WHEN I inquired from a Pakistan foreign minister how India could improve relations with China, he said that the road from Delhi to Beijing passed through Islamabad. What he said some 30 years ago still holds good. President K.R. Narayanan must have realised this during the state visit to China, although President Jiang Zemin welcomed him as *Lao Pengqu*, "an old friend".

The anti-India attitude may have struck an equation between China and Pakistan to begin with. But they are so close today that the policy of one towards New Delhi is the carbon copy of the other. Recall the intemperate language used by Beijing after the Pokhran-II blast in 1998. Pakistan rushed to China with a high-powered delegation to denounce India in equally strong terms.

All the resolutions at the UN and observations at international forums show Pakistan is always on the side of China, whether voting or running down India.

Perhaps Beijing feels indebted to General Ayub Khan who parcelled out the 200 square metres of territory from the disputed Kashmir under Pakistan and gave it to China. That firmly connected Sinkiang and Tibet. Strange, the transfer of the territory took place in 1962, when India was fighting a war against China, over the road Beijing had stealthily built in the Aksai Chin in the Ladakh region to link Sinkiang.

The contrast between New Delhi and Islamabad was too glaring to leave China unimpressed. The territory in the

north was a lifeline for China's integrity. Even otherwise, India represented to Beijing at that time the intersection of interests of the Soviet Union and the US, something anathema to China. Since it no longer saw New Delhi as a potential partner in the process of confrontation with the super powers, Beijing's strategy was to undermine the strength and influence of New Delhi by military, political and economic pressures.

After the end of the cold war, the situation could have been different. But the mistake which India has continued to commit is to rub into China that it prefers Islamabad to New Delhi. Of course, it does. India should accept it and try to build their relationship. China feels that it should not be at the expense of Pakistan.

It is no use pointing out to Beijing again and again that it is helping Islamabad in the nuclear field. America and some other countries in the west have also been saying so. This has had no effect. China probably honestly believes that in Pakistan it has in the region a country which will stand by it even when Beijing is in the wrong. "Pakistan is our all-weather friend", the Chinese leaders say repeatedly.

Islamabad's political dependence on Beijing too is not a secret. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif first flew to China and then to Washington to help him retrieve the situation in Kargil. General Pervez

Musharraf, after he took over, went to Beijing to explain the circumstances and perhaps to seek its blessing. The two countries are in constant touch.

Narayanan's reference, if not the plea, to India's membership to the Security Council during the talks with the Chinese leaders, was a mistake. New Delhi should have anticipated the reaction from the strong opposition Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar voiced two weeks earlier. Islamabad has also its own rea-

sons to oppose. But it is primarily Beijing's objection that has weighed with the Pakistan policy-framers.

New Delhi unfairly compares Narayanan's visit to China with that of France last month. President Chirac offered full support to India's seat in the Security Council. This was because France considered New Delhi a friend. So much so that Paris stopped the supply of Mirage planes to Pakistan at India's bidding.

In contrast, China has reportedly supplied to Islamabad M-11 missiles, which are capable of carrying nuclear war-

heads. This should not surprise New Delhi because it is Beijing's way of restoring parity with New Delhi, which possesses such missiles.

Narayanan did not succeed in having even a loose kind of understanding to fight terrorism. China is not against it but it does not want to hurt Pakistan's susceptibilities. After all, New Delhi singles out Islamabad. Unlike Washington, Beijing does not wish to give the impression that it too holds Islamabad responsible for en-

powers at Colombo indicated after the cessation of hostilities in 1962. The Agreement on Maintaining Peace and Tranquillity on the LAT was signed in 1993 during the visit by former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to China. But Beijing has been refusing to define or demarcate it since.

Beijing claims chunks of Indian territory as its own. Whenever New Delhi has pointed out the errors in the Chinese maps, the reply has been that they are of the Kuomintang government days and that the communists have had no time to correct them. This is what Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-Lai told Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954 and 1957 and this is the stock reply by the Chinese team which meets Indian officials to discuss the border every now and then.

New Delhi's case is that from the sixth century onwards it was known that the southern limits of Sinkiang lay along the Kuen Lun ranges. The Aksai Chin Plateau and the Lingzi Tang plains were never a part of China or Sinkiang. India has produced 600 pieces of documentary evidence to establish that these areas were utilised by the people of Ladakh and administered by the governments of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir. And, therefore, they are India's.

That Narayanan has been able to impart urgency on the delineation of at least LAT is an

achievement of sorts. If after signing an agreement with Narasimha Rao, China has not demarcated the LAT, there is no guarantee that it would do so now. Beijing has disputed certain areas on the Indian side of the LAT. In the face of it, the drawing of boundary between the two countries looks too distant. China has not resiled from the position it took in the fifties.

India, on the other hand, feels embarrassed even to talk about the sad developments in Tibet. After having recognised China's suzerainty over Tibet, New Delhi has washed its hands of Tibet. Does it mean that India endorses every move of China on Tibet? Narayanan was directly asked by the Chinese leaders about the future of the 15-year-old Tibetan boy who has taken refuge in India.

Narayanan did not say anything beyond that India had given him rights to live for the time being. This was an opportunity to ask China why the conditions obtaining in Tibet were such that even after more than 45 years of its integration with China, people were wanting to leave Tibet.

When China has not officially accepted Sikkim's integration with India, nor the hold over Arunachal and some parts of Assam, why should New Delhi keep quiet on Tibet? The Dalai Lama wants only an autonomous status within China. India is unnecessarily on the defensive. Narayanan should not have minced words. As a person who is considered a friend in China, he would not have been misunderstood. Beijing would have at least known the depth of the hurt among Indians.

US Missile Defence System Doubt Raised on Effectiveness

by Harun ur Rashid

There is a growing view that it is not a credible position for the US to insist on the development of the national missile defence system. The US's insistence on its development appears to be against the overwhelming majority views of other countries.

war emerged in the Balkans in 1991. The Balkan became a zone of poverty and security. The Kosovo war in 1999 did not resolve the problem.

The US thought for a while that after the collapse of the communism the threat of nuclear war had disappeared. That perception appears not to be correct. The US suspects that a few countries in the Middle East and North Asia are believed to be engaged in developing nuclear warheads and the US perceives the development of long-range missiles by North Korea to be a distinct threat to its security.

The US administration continues to wrestle with what nuclear policy and nuclear force structure make sense in the light of the post-cold war situation and the increased attention to the problems of nuclear

proliferation after India and Pakistan conducted the nuclear tests in May 1998. There is a view that the range of purposes for which the US might seek to use nuclear weapons includes deterring deliberate nuclear attack on the US, preventing accidental or unauthorised nuclear attacks on the US and deterring the action of 'rogue states' or terrorists.

Deterrence appears to be the fundamental purpose for which the US retains nuclear weapons. After the cold war the US seems to be concerned with the capacity of 'rogue states' to launch a nuclear surprise first strike against the US. To prevent such a devastating blow against a broad range of military targets in the US, the Clinton administration has revived the development of national missile defence system to ward

off the attacks from the "rogue states".

Russia, China and to a certain extent Germany oppose the development of the missile defence system by the US as it would open up a new arms race, threatening the stability of the world security environment. The recent trip by President Clinton to Russia could not impress President Putin on the necessity of developing the missile defence system. Rather Russia put forward a counter proposal to the US. The Russian proposal would mean that the nuclear warheads would be destroyed at the source and not in space and it is willing to develop this technology jointly with the US.

All the indications show that they do not seem to be interested in Russia's proposal. Both the Presidential contenders in

the US (Governor Bush and Vice President Al Gore) seem to be determined to go ahead with the missile defence system in case President does not decide on the issue before leaving his office next January. Many experts believe that President Clinton should not decide on this issue and leave it to next administration.

There is a view that the attempt by Washington to develop the national missile defence system is flawed. Firstly, the trial indicated that the missile system (known as killer vehicle) failed to detect the decoy nuclear warhead from the real ones. Any decoy nuclear warhead appears to be sufficient to attract the missile. Therefore its development by the US does not seem to be effective in its goal.

Secondly, the attempt by the

"rogue states" to launch nuclear attack on the US presupposes their well-developed stage of scientific and industrial base. There is a strong view among the defence experts in the US that the threat from "rogue states" of striking first the US is nil and the development of missile system with such colossal amount of money appears to be totally misplaced.

Thirdly, the recent commitment by the big five nuclear states including the US to dismantle nuclear weapons at the Review Conference of the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in New York does not make sense if the US is determined to develop the new missile system. Furthermore it is contrary to the provisions of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty signed by President Nixon and President Brezhnev of the former Soviet Union.

There is a growing view that it is not a credible position for the US to insist on the development of the national missile defence system. The US's insistence of its development appears to be against the overwhelming majority views of other countries.

The author, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

To the Editor ...

Suhrawardy Uddayan at stake

Sir, Earlier, I used to take regular morning walk in the Suhrawardy Uddayan but as I have shifted my residence from that area, I haven't been to that place lately. However, on 17 June while I was in the area, I planned to take a stroll and tried to cross the Uddayan from Doel Chatterjee to Art College leaving my car behind. Surprisingly I couldn't get through. And the reason was the trees that fell due to the last month's tornado are yet to be removed from the jogging track. But what struck me most was that a major portion of the Uddayan has been earmarked as a new mausoleum sight. I was really

shocked and frustrated to notice this. And when I talked to a few morning-walkers, they also expressed similar frustration.

Again hundreds of trees will be cut down; the whole area will look deserted. And the environmental impact would be beyond description. Sufficient greenery, parks and open spaces in the city have really become limited. Though the government takes tree plantation programmes every year, it hasn't turned out to be much of a success. But still the government seems unaffected and continues to make different plans to shrink the few open spaces available.

The Osmany Uddayan has been saved by the timely interference by a group of hard-liner

environmentalists. But nobody seems to come forward to speak for the Suhrawardy Uddayan and it seems that the existence of this Uddayan is really in jeopardy.

M. A. Matin
Trisal, Mymensingh

Construction and destruction

Sir, In recent times, DCC has constructed a good number of foot over-bridges in Dhaka spending crores of taka. DCC is now reported to be contemplating construction of ten more foot over-bridges at a cost of seven crore taka on the one hand and on the other hand it is going to demolish a few existing foot over-bridges, as those are

not being used by the pedestrians.

These foot over-bridges are the glaring examples of DCC's abuse of power, ill-planning, lack of efficiency and responsibility, failure in handling road traffic and wastage of time, energy and colossal amount of public money.

In modern time in most of the metropolitan cities construction of foot over-bridges is considered out-dated, obsolete and useless. I think we should also avoid and discourage construction of foot over-bridges in our metropolis. Instead we may have more and more underground passes in the city to cross the ever busy and traffic jammed thoroughfares. However, where there is no possibil-

ity and no space is available for construction of underground passes we may go for foot over-bridges with a modified and better design comfortable and easy to use.

O. H. Kabir
Wari, Dhaka-1203

Garment village

Sir, There is some good news in the media: the powerful RMG magnates have at last agreed in principle to examine the possibility of shifting the garment factories within the Dhaka metro area to outlying defunct SOE plots. It should have been done long ago, saving a couple of thousand crore taka in subsidies.

It is also difficult to do it due

to bureaucratic hassles, as the house rents in Dhaka would go down drastically (several million sq ft of floor space would be released by some 2,000 garment factories in the residential areas) and the house owners (new and not so new) have still to refund some of the house-building loans.

Then again the question of political will comes in, followed by strict application of good governance principle. The present regime would gain some popularity if overloaded Dhaka City could be downloaded a bit. The move would bring in double benefit for the harassed Dhakaites. Let's wait and watch.

A. H. Dhaka