

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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Why Monopolise a National Joy?

YOU can't put a political, partisan and monopolistic tag to an emotion called joy, especially the one that gushed forth on hearing the news of Bangladesh's elevation to Test status in cricket. A good news such as that is best savoured with restraint, poise, tributes to architects, past and present, and sharing of gratitude all around. The euphoria and ecstasy that are bound to germinate need to be tempered with a sense of obligation about what it entails in terms of living up to the new-found status. The recognition has not come to us as a decoration but as a responsibility devolving upon us with our entitlement to play at the Test level.

But we are perhaps one country that is bent upon giving a signal to the outside world that we don't know how to handle a victory or utilise a triumph for the greater good of the country. The government of the day is so taken up by the triumphant mood of the moment that it falls head over heels to capitalise on it the wrong, even a counter-productive way!

What happened at the "Joy Rally" organised by ruling party people at the Paltan Maidan concourse on Wednesday is essentially no different than the conduct of the victory celebrations on Bangladesh's winning of the ICC Trophy in 1997. One need not recount the opportunity lost two years ago to see a convergence of celebration taking place across the political divide on a truly apolitical occasion. But that its repetition would be in a worse form is something that we have a great difficulty reconciling to.

At the Paltan Maidan celebrations the Prime Minister, the State Minister for Sports and President of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) staged the circarama of mutual back-scratching and showering of praises with the prime minister predictably getting the lion's share of the appreciation bonanza.

All credits were monopolised to the AL rule since 1996, or for that matter by the BCB leadership under Saber Hossain Chowdhury. No body can deny that Sheikh Hasina's government played a proactive role in clinching the Test status nor is the efficient representation of our case by the state minister or the president of BCB at the right places belittled. But in giving credit where it is due let's say that if it is the present BCB that put in an application for the Test status it was the previous one that led our entry to the ICC in a formal sense paving the way for this day.

Naturally an amount of credit goes to the ruling party by virtue of the cumulative efforts culminating in success during its tenure. Rather than seeing the people praise them why should they have resorted to politicisation, partisanship and self-eulogy denying others any space, even demonising them totally unnecessarily on an occasion like that?

Need we remind them the Bengali adage which translates as follows: "That whom the people call great is truly so, those that self-advertise their greatness have none of it."

Friday Mailbox

Better late than never

Sir, It was really heartening that at long last BNP and its allies decided to join the Parliament and finally made their way in. But we were at the same time taken back to learn that they had taken this decision only to record their presence so that they don't lose their membership. These MPs are the lawmakers of the country and they are to deliver (in the House) what the people of this country directly needs, besides their acting as exposure of the drawbacks of the government through their participation in the Parliament which they are virtually meant for and paid for. But BNP boycotted JS for more than one year making the parliamentary system almost dysfunctional and made no bone about it. And our image abroad as a country forging ahead with fledgling democracy became questionable. Therefore, the print media in particular made persistent appeal to the Opposition for joining the Parliament, but they did not care a straw for paying heed to them. They shirked their mandatory duties vested in them by their electorates on various shaky allegations against the government, but they did not feel uncomfortable or disdainful to enjoy the privileges attached to their membership. Now in apprehension of being stripped of their membership they walked up to stall the speaker's constitutional action against them, and scotched any move for constitutional amendments.

The Opposition members have admitted in one way or other that they had joined the Parliament for the sake of joining only and not for making the House lively by their active participation, by raising and dwelling upon national issues which they are to perform as their moral obligations. However, the reason they have aired for their joining at the end of the current parliament smacks of something else. It seemed to many that if they went losing their membership and so and so forth their privileges they would have simultaneously lose their immunity and might have found them vulnerable to unforeseen misfortune for the alleged misdeeds many of them stand accused of.

Be that as it may, better late than never. The people heaved a sigh of relief that the Opposition were back in the House and keenly wanted them to keep their mark in the House by playing their due role. That would've undoubtedly paid BNP, in particular, more in augmenting its image and popularity. But doing nothing of that sort the Opposition have tantamount to playing ducks and drakes with the people's aspirations.

A. H. Dewan
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Dhaka Cantonment

Ministerial rule!

Sir, It appeared in national dailies that a State Minister's son illegally grabbed about few highas of land of Rajuk in Uttara Model Town and constructed unauthorised structures of some 516 shops, named Shah Jalal Super Market. When press people made it public, it probably embarrassed the PM and she ordered an action against the perpetrators. The Home Ministry ordered to evict and demolish those structures within 72 hours and Rajuk followed the ultimatum (DS 14 Jun).

But I wonder how in a democratic rule such capture of Rajuk land was possible when a police station (Uttara Police Station) existed only few hundred yards away from the spot! How WASA, DESA and City Corporation provided services or allowed illegal services to that construction! As per rule of law, the perpetrator should

have been nabbed by law enforcers and exposed to public. In the present action, the perpetrators are identified (in black and white), but they are still at large and evading an appropriate punishment. It is amazing that in a democratic country, law enforcers cannot touch these so-called influential people even after they are found deeply involved in criminal acts. What is this "MP's son or relative", a status often referred! Why law enforcers drag their feet and show special considerations for them! Aren't they also the citizen of this country? Is the law of the land refers them as privileged persons and thus they are to be treated as such? The ad hoc action taken against "Shah Jalal Super Market" appeared like recapture of *char*. Whereas, there should have been a thorough investigation for such high handedness, illegal practice and criminal activities of individual using shelter of minister or MP as kinsman. And if that individual found guilty, state should have proceeded accordingly for polluting the society.

A R Choudhury
Uttara, Dhaka

Carrot and stick approach

Sir, It appears from the blistering attack on the Opposition by the AL Chief (who is also the PM) that the government is not genuinely interested in the return of the Opposition to the JS (at the end of the tenure).

Our present political culture has a lot of hypocrisy in it, perhaps due to deprivation in the past decades. If this be the state then why the citizens would be interested in backing up the poor political leadership?

Working at routine level

Sir, Budget 2000-2001: A Brief Review of Direct Taxes by M Tofazzal Hossain (DS, June 21) was illuminating in pin-pointing the details in professional daily working — provided the policies can anticipate the unimpressive reaction of tinkering with after-thoughts, and the adverse effect of political and pressure groups on public administration.

Bring it down to the routine level! Is not a bureaucratic trap, but an exercise in system analysis for better efficiency, while watching human system loss and professional inadequacy. Once again the importance of PARC has been revealed, but the urgency in reforms is missing, due to lack of political will.

Control of a tax network in an environment controlled by black money and bank-loan-default culture is an exercise, which goes beyond the palliatives available in textbooks. Bureaucracy depends heavily on precedents; but there is no research mechanism to sort out the percentage of bad precedents. Due to the noting system in the Secretariat, initiative and innovation is expected from the bottom!

The fuzzy details cited in the article apply equally well to the other government departments and agencies. The environment of the existing civil service has to be recast. There had been many starts; but the processing petered out after a short phase; therefore the question of achievement or end result does not arise. The Finance Ministry and its attached offices are not exposed agencies, as these works quietly behind the scene. The proof is exposed when the pudding cannot be digested.

A Frustrated Citizen
Dhaka

of the ruling party. The time chosen for this appointment is due to the fact that the new incumbent would carry out government's desire to exercise all-out influence on the Commission in favour of holding Upazilla and Zilla Parishad elections before the caretaker government takes over.

As for the credentials of the new Election Commissioner, it is almost an open book. Shafur Rahman has been seen by hundreds or thousands of people as to have assumed leadership of the few rebel civil servants, who took a very active role in the Awami League's movement to topple Begum Khaleda Zia's government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in early part of 1996. He represented the highest echelon of bureaucracy who willfully and happily violated the ancient and universally practised code of conduct of civil servants for being apolitical and got into Awami League's *Janata Manchla* or a public podium to address political rallies. The stand taken and addresses made by him left no doubt in one's mind that he was

New Election Commissioner

Partial Unfolding of Awami League's Election Blueprint

So long, serving or retired members of the judiciary were generally chosen primarily on account of their past experience in having enjoyed constitutional authority to perform duties independent of the whims and caprices of the executive. Members of the civil service, in contrast, are generally habituated to work under the dictates of the executive, who are assumed to be public representatives, democratically elected or not. Civil servants are, therefore, more pliable and are likely to be more easily persuaded, as a matter of previous habit, to work according to the will, fair and foul, of government leaders.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

totally committed to the Awami League. Subsequently, he was duly rewarded for his valuable service. How can anybody expect a fair and impartial deal in the implementation of a policy or carrying out an action when it goes against Awami League's interests? None can. His appointment is, therefore, a part of the well-conceived plan of the Awami League to use the Election Commission for "managing" elections to achieve victory. This act, therefore, represents a blatant violation of the spirit of the constitution and totally negates the principles of democracy.

Hon'ble President's role in this case has been widely talked about. True, he has no constitutional authority to refuse ac-

tion recommended by the government. But he has, no doubt, moral authority and his own conscience, besides being a venerable judge most of his life, to discern the just from the unjust, the truth from the falsehood and the desirable from the undesirable. He may well argue that his hands were tied; he was helpless. It is truth but not the whole truth. Constitutional limitations do not inhibit him from acting on moral compunction. There is nothing in the constitution that prevents him from delaying the issue. He could have taken more time to reflect on it, could have asked the Prime Minister to meet him for further discussion or even sent the file back with certain queries or observations. But he

did not do any such thing nor resorted to any action to express his displeasure at the appointment of a grossly controversial partisan person to a constitutional post that warrants, above all, strict neutrality in actions relating to contending political parties. The Chief Election Commissioner, on his part, may not feel as easy with his reputedly overbearing new colleague, unless both of them act in concert and shun scruples to implement the master plan of the Awami League.

Despite absence in the Constitution of universally recognised requirements of the personal qualities attributable to an Election Commissioner, it is a common knowledge that democratic norms and even common sense dictate that, in the light of his background and past activities, an Election Commissioner must be able to carry out his functions independently, fairly and impartially without fear and favour. So long, serving or retired members of the judiciary were generally chosen primarily on account of their past experience

in having enjoyed constitutional authority to perform duties independent of the whims and caprices of the executive. Members of the civil service, in contrast, are generally habituated to work under the dictates of the executive, who are assumed to be public representatives, democratically elected or not. Civil servants are, therefore, more pliable and are likely to be more easily persuaded, as a matter of previous habit, to work according to the will, fair and foul, of government leaders. That is why the Awami League has chosen to appoint the most partisan civil servant available on the list as an Election Commissioner, thereby debasing the noble institution of the Election Commission and seeking to convert it to another of its party forums.

One may thus surmise, through appointment of the new Election Commissioner the public have savoured another taste of the Awami League's game. The ruling party appears determined to proceed with the implementation of its blueprint to win elections, by all possible means, through measures akin to Awami League's past one-party BAKSAL rule and the present fascist way of going about it. In the process, moral conscience and democratic aspirations of the people are thrown to the winds, with little cognizance to the absolute truth that it is the will of the people that matters and in the final analysis is destined to triumph.

The author, a former Ambassador, is a Member of BNP's Advisory Council.

Cricketers, Please Fix Nothing but Dignity

Last Monday, Bangladesh joined the league of Test playing countries, and, once again, this nation has been jubilant. This jubilation is about our national pride not about whether our players are likely to earn more money. Robert Mugabe had boasted in 1984 that he wanted everyone to play cricket in Zimbabwe, because he wanted it to be a nation of gentlemen.

Crosstalk

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan



so much big money for a game, which is about negotiating between a bat and a ball in a playing area of 22 yards.

The earliest reference to an 11-a-side match, played in Sussex for a stake of 50 guineas, dates from 1697. But the stake eventually settled for a trophy in addition to remuneration, prizes and glamour, which came with the game. German poet Goethe said that what was important in life was life itself, not a result of life. Similarly, what was important in sport was sport itself until the result got important for bettors' lust. Any idea how it has turned the game inside out? The victory and defeat are now worked out in the bookmakers' minds, while players simply act out their wishes for hush money.

Is that just another sign that the world is bounding down the rungs of the moral ladder? Time magazine has quoted Graeme Wright, New Zealand editor of *Wisden's Almanac*, the cricketer's bible, as

saying: "There is a very fine line drawn between taking money for being a player and taking money for something that might influence the way the game is bet upon." Why is that a fine line? Isn't it obvious in any profession that there is a moral wedge between paycheck and kickback? How is it different from a judge who takes bribe to tilt his verdict, or a politician who is on the payroll of some vested interests?

Perhaps a cricketer has a larger constituency than a judge or a politician, because his performance reaches an audience of nearly 1.2 billion people, just in the four countries of South Asia. How does it feel to have so many souls undulate in the ecstasy of contrived competition? Doesn't it amount to bluffing when the innocent fun of sport is exploited to feed the insolent frenzy of greed?

When Hansie Cronje confessed to UCB managing director Ali Bacher in the middle of the night and got sacked from

the South African team, the head of his church appealed to his countrymen not to blow up a sporting scandal into "a national crisis." But the fact was other way around. A sporting crisis sent its tremors to start off national scandal in the cricket playing countries. Think about names like Kapil Dev, Mohammad Azharuddin, and Selim Malik, which have been uttered in connection with match fixing! Think how an entire nation and its government went berserk over the victory of their team and gave hero's welcome to players who may not have deserved it (if Selim Malik is to be believed!).

To hit the nail on the head, cricket has opened a crack on the window to our depravities. Why would cricketers, the heroes of millions, give away their hard-earned honour to ribald laughter? Just imagine that Hansie Cronje took \$8,200 before his departure for India, thus swallowing the bait of his own undoing! Players learn in the discipline of sport how to control their emotions. But temptation is more powerful than emotion. It debilitates the state of conscience while emotion dispenses the state of consciousness. One feels joy when consciousness elevates conscience. Sorrow is when consciousness is aggrieved by consciousness. And fear is when

they threaten each other.

When Kapil Dev tried to hold back his tears in an interview with BBC, he must have struggled between sorrow and fear, sorrow for an attack on his honour and fear for the chance of losing it. For that particular moment the star cricketer from India had failed to harness hard-earned discipline to check his emotions, as conscience and consciousness wobbled on each other. Nothing was wrong with that for it only showed the human side of a man made later than life by his devotion to cricket. That is what seems let in the match fixing scandals — players seem to be more devoted to money than competition. Let anybody realises, it turns sportsman into a gladiator who must win or lose for a compulsion other than his dignity.

Last Monday, Bangladesh joined the league of Test playing countries, and, once again, this nation has been jubilant. This jubilation is about our national pride not about whether our players are likely to earn more money. Robert Mugabe had boasted in 1984 that he wanted everyone to play cricket in Zimbabwe, because he wanted it to be a nation of gentlemen. Now that every thing from examinations to elections can be fixed in this country, will cricket bring us more of the same thing? While we congratulate ourselves on our success in cricket, that is one question we need to ponder. Meanwhile, let us hope this will be a cricket-playing nation of gentlemen who will fix nothing but their dignity.

Korean Summit: Strategic Implications

by Harun ur Rashid

Although the summit is perceived as a first step of re-unification of Korea, many analysts express their doubts whether South Korea or North Korea wants to be re-united. They argue that South Korea does not wish to take a huge financial burden for the development of North Korea as West Germany did for East Germany. Furthermore it is arguable whether the communist regime in North Korea would wish to merge with the democratic and capitalist regime of South Korea.

Washington and Beijing. A few tangible results have already been visible as an endorsement of the summit. The US has eased trade sanctions on North Korea this week and allowed air traffic between North Korea and the US.

North Korea's debilitated economy has been widely considered as a major factor in its tentative opening to the world. North Korea did not do well in its economy last year. Pyongyang was reported to have posted a 12.8 per cent year-on-year decline in its trade deficit in 1999, with imports growing by 2.4 per cent and exports plunging by 33 per cent. North Korea's economy is estimated to have shrunk more than 4 per cent in the 1990s. Its total GDP is estimated at US\$8520 million (population 23 million) compared with US\$1.96 billion in 1990.

Given the economic climate in North Korea, the South Korean conglomerates see a huge opportunity to invest in North Korea. It was reported that a dozen of South Korean busi-

nessmen joined South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung's delegation to explore the possibility of investment in North Korea. It is believed that many South Korean businesses are attracted to the North Korea's low wages and disciplined workforce.

The South Korean business giants, such as Hyundai, Samsung and LG seek to boost their investments in North Korea. Analysts believe that South Korean companies are expected to play a pivotal role in developing the North's infrastructure if reconciliation efforts are translated into a reality. According to South Korea's Construction Economic Research Institute, the North requires nearly US\$65.5 billion dollars to bring its infrastructure to a reasonable level. However, Daewoo Securities Co. says that the figure could be as high as US\$270 billion dollars.

The summit obviously seems to reduce the risk of war in one of the world's tinderboxes. It ushers in a whole new era of relations between the two Koreas. There is a view that the summit

has also changed the fundamentals of the strategic position of the big powers in the region.

First, the rapprochement will probably weaken the position of the US on the Korean peninsula. This is because Seoul will have increasing difficulty explaining the need for the US military bases in South Korea where 37,000 US troops have been stationed. Their future appears to be in doubt. North Korea may not fully cooperate with South Korea until the US troops are removed from the soil of South Korea.

Second, a view prevails that it will improve China's position in the region. It is believed that China encouraged North Korean leader Kim Jong-il for talks with South Korean President. There is a view that China does not wish North Korea, its neighbour, to collapse economically and wants to keep it as a friendly buffer state between her and the capitalist South Korea. If North Korea can open itself to trade, it will grow

is in China's interest.

Third, the reconciliation efforts put Russia and Japan into a new reality on the peninsula.

Japan is expected to buy a place in North Korea with the aid and investment. Russia's President Vladimir Putin is arriving next month to Pyongyang to try to restore friendship. There is a view that if Moscow and other countries come to Pyongyang, there should be less need for Pyongyang to send its officials to overseas.

Conclusion: Although the summit is perceived as a first step of re-unification of Korea, many analysts express their doubts whether South Korea or North Korea wants to be re-united. They argue that South Korea does not wish to take a huge financial burden for the development of North Korea as West Germany did for East Germany (despite billions of dollars of spending in East Germany, former East Germans will take a long time to catch up West German's standard of living). Furthermore it is arguable whether the communist regime in North Korea would wish to merge with the democratic and capitalist regime of South Korea. This perception appears to be complicated by the fact that the security interests of China, the US and Russia seem to converge in the Korean peninsula. There is a big question mark whether the big powers want the reunification of Korea in the immediate future.

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