

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 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 newfound 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 aback 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 direly 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 defunct 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 fag 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.

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Ministerial rule!

Sir, It appeared in national dailies that a State Minister's son illegally grabbed about few bighas 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 perpetrators should

Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.

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.

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.

Before we go deep into it, the first question arises in one's mind as to why the government decided to alter the normal composition of the Commission and what prompted them to choose this point of time for the appointment? The Election Commission has so far consisted of one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners. The Awami League decided to change this numerical composition of the Commission by adding to it another Commissioner with a partisan incumbent who is willing and able to serve the ruling party's interests in the coming elections. The two existing Election Commissioners are due to retire after some time but before the expiry of legal tenure of the present government. Ordinarily, the next caretaker government would have been expected to appoint their replacements in which case, the new Election Commissioners would be likely to be impartial and not be at the beck and call

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. Shafiqur 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 Mancha* 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

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 reputably 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 recognized 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

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 larger than life by his devotion to cricket. That is what seems like in the match fixing scandals as 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 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 it to be a nation of gentlemen.

The South African team, the head of his church appealed to his countrymen not to blow up a sporting scandal into "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 Sehwan 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 Sehwan 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 that emotion. It debilitates the state of conscience while emotion dispenses the state of consciousness. One feels joy when consciousness elevates conscience. Sorrow is when conscience is aggrieved by consciousness. And fear is when

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 Koreas, 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.

The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador.

Cricketers, Please Fix Nothing but Dignity

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he cited, he mentioned the name of one "John," who paid him to lose the Mandela Cup final against Pakistan in Cape Town in 1995. According to him, the same man had also paid Australian cricketers Mark Waugh and Shane Warne for match fixing.

Ordinarily that would have been visionary power, if not for the cameo role cut in the process by the bookmakers. Hansie Cronje, the disgraced captain of the South African team, recently sang like a canary, giving his tell-all testimony on match fixing. In the examples

fix one of the two teams in a match. One or more pivotal players of that team will be asked to either lose wickets or bat laudily or do whatever it takes to lose the match. In return for their cooperation, they can get paid anywhere between \$10,000 and \$250,000. Honesty, Diogenes cautioned, has never been the strongest suit of the human species. What has got everybody up a stump in the recent match fixing scandals in cricket is not that the players are being dishonest but that they are debasing a sport, which was gaining popularity as an innocent form of recreation.

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