

The Daily Star

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Flood Response Still Tentative

Government's response to the flood situation which is well into its second week leaves much to be desired. It has not got the basics right as yet in terms of the current flood relief operation, let alone the post-flood relief operation which has to be undertaken hard on the heels of the former. While waters rise at places they recede somewhere else within the radius of the flooded zone, each motion generating its own set of relief requirements but without any breathing space between the two to have them met by turn.

Now, where have we got the basics wrong? First and foremost, we do not have an authentic statistic about the total number of people affected, such as were based on confirmation of the preliminary figures by independent sources. Therefore, to begin with, we find ourselves ill-placed to be making a reasonably accurate assessment of the relief needs. Just how much we have been groping in the darkness becomes transparent from the field reports saying that relief in kind and cash has so far amounted to less than one and a half kilogram of rice and Tk one per head. And whereas going by official figures, as on last Monday, the number of affected souls stood at nearly three million the allocation of financial assistance kept inexplicably low at Tk 29 lakh only. The general belief is that the number of flood victims could well be in the region of five million. Furthermore, there has been a glaring mismatch between the speed at which the shelter centres were opened and that at which relief materials were arranged for the inmates of the make-shift camps. In other words, we did not make it a point to have the logistics ready before we opened the relief centres.

As a matter of fact, the gap between requirement and delivery of material which is causing all the hardship to the people can be put down to lack of coordination at all levels. The ministries involved have not coordinated; the government and non-government organisations are yet to synchronise their relief efforts; the administration is not working in tandem even with the ruling party MPs; and finally, there is hardly any coordination between the administration and the field-level workers.

With such home-work behind us, it was patently unsurprising that we showed how unpreparedness we were to assess our relief needs which our development partners wanted to know at a meeting they attended with government functionaries on Wednesday. Given that we have the ability to meet the bulk requirement of food by virtue of our sizable cereals stocks we should have been in a position to quantify our supplementary requirement with relative ease.

The government's flood response has so far been tardy, lacking in a sense of urgency and purpose. First of all, the administration allowed itself to remain in a baffled state at the unexpected phenomenon of a flood where it had hardly occurred beforehand, thereby reducing the lead time to undertake prompt relief operation. Then it curtailed the maneuverability further by choosing to rest on the oars of being 'good at coping with floods'. The lesson should have been learnt by now to face the floods on the latter's terms rather than on our own wishful ones.

THE fighting scenes had perfect camera shots (a medley of long, medium and close-ups) befitting staccato sound effects of high decibels, chiaroscuro of changing lights, and lots of blood-stained bodies of the dead and injured lying on the ground or being carried in makeshift stretchers. It was no action movie with Bruce Willis or Arnold Schwarzenegger standing tall unnerved by the sound and fury. It was a real life combat being fought on some of the very land where the Biblical final battlefield, Armageddon is said to sit and where the Palestinians and the Israelis have fought off and on for the past 50 years. But this one, shown live on TV last week, was the most violent and bloodiest of all. Ominously, this could either be the beginning of a new round of clashes or the final battle as Armageddon was predicted to be.

The Palestinians fighting on the streets of Gaza and the West Bank last week were visibly out-gunned and overpowered by a superior foe. Represented mostly by unarmed stone-throwing youths and a clutch of lightly armed police, they were hopelessly pitted against a professionally trained Israeli army who used heavy weapons and even pressed into service gunship helicopters that spewed fire from above like angry dragons. The Biblical imagery of David and Goliath was also evoked by the confrontation but it was true only to the extent of images, there being no doubt about the result of the unequal battle going Goliath's way. The bloody spectacle was stunning in its effect and numbed all feelings for a while as if what was happening was not real, only virtually real. The sound bites by the brave TV correspondent, risking their lives to cover the fight, left no doubt that the Israeli army had begun a carnage of civilians and semi-civilians with awesome firepower. The ruthless Israelis could very well have Armageddon, now, on their minds. The bloody clash took a toll of 70 lives within a week and as the skirmish continued into the second week the list of casualties lengthened. All members of the Security Council except the US condemned the use of disproportionate force by the Israelis. As in the past America routinely took a pro-Israeli stance and observed that the time to apportion blame had not yet come. To the Americans, who have consistently given financial, political and moral

support to their ally and protectorate Israel, seeing was not the same as believing. It is behaviour like this which makes America, the champion of liberty, look like a hypocrite and morally bankrupt.

Behind the latest bloody clash lay the arrogance of superior brute power and deep-seated hatred of the Israelis for the Palestinians. The most immediate cause was the unwarranted and cynical visit by the hawkish Israeli leader Ariel Sharon to the premises of Al-Aqsa mosque in Eastern Jerusalem, one of Islam's holiest sites for which Palestinians are claiming sovereignty over the divided city. Sharon's visit, coming in the wake of the failed Camp David summit, was obviously meant to show contempt for the Palestinian claim and re-affirm the determination of the Israelis to extend sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem. It was such a naked challenge and blatant provocation that the Palestinians already seething with discontent over the moribund state of the peace process and the refusal to meet their basic demands in the Camp David Summit were bound to react with angry protest. The eruption of bloody clashes was thus wantonly provoked with the sinister design of achieving on the streets of Gaza and the West Bank what the Israelis failed to obtain at the negotiating table at Camp David: surrender and renunciation of the claim over East Jerusalem by the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. By triggering off the pent-up anger and resentment among the Palestinians the Israelis unwittingly vindicated the stand taken by Yasser Arafat at Camp David in the last week of July. He stood firm on his ground and told the Americans and the Israelis that East Jerusalem was not negotiable and the Palestinians want to exercise sovereign rights over the city. It is a pledge given by him to his people and to the Muslim world as well. There was no way he could balk from that position.

After two weeks' peace talks at Camp David under the oversight of President Clinton (he called the summit meeting), the negotiation founded on the issue of the final status of Eastern Jerusalem. As a conciliatory move and by way of compromise the maximum that was offered by the Israeli side, supported by the Americans, was local autonomy over a few Arab neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty with a Palestinian capital in the outlying village of Abu Dis. This not only fell far short of the Palestinian demand but also mocked with searing irony the idea of sharing

the sovereignty over Jerusalem. The Israelis passionately argued that East Jerusalem had underground the ruins of the first Temple Mount destroyed by the Romans and the Western Wall of the second Temple Mount and as such was theirs on historical ground.

The history of the Jewish temples is not contested by the Palestinians. Nor is the holiness of the sites underground (First Temple Mount) and above the ground (Western Wall of the Second Temple Mount) to the Jews denied by any one. But as against invisible

remnants of holy sites are to be the basis of ownership (sovereignty) by a particular religious group (or a theocratic state) a large number of places will have to change hands globally which is not only illogical but unpractical as well. The Israeli case for sovereignty over East Jerusalem, therefore, pales compared to that of the Palestinians (Muslims).

Under international law also the claim of Israel over East Jerusalem is not tenable because of the UN Resolution that requires Israel to go back to its border that

with little credibility and the law of the jungle will rule supreme.

The American administration and the Jewish controlled Press misunderstood Arafat's unflinching stand on East Jerusalem and interpreted it as either being a nasty obstinacy or a tactical move amenable to change through further negotiation. They just could not understand that in respect of East Jerusalem Arafat simply had no choice, almost no room for political manoeuvre. East Jerusalem is not geography, a piece of land, or a city. It is a powerful symbol that goes into the core of the Palestinian identity and represents the unity of the Muslim community because of Al-Aqsa. Moreover, it is a matter of getting back something that was forcibly taken away not in the hoary past but in the latter half of 20th century. East Jerusalem is as much a political issue as an emotional one touching the psyche of a people who were dispossessed of land that they owned only the other day by the Israelis on the ground of claims dating back to 2500 years ago. The force of the emotive issue of East Jerusalem is far greater for the Palestinians and Muslims compared to the Israelis. Yasser Arafat had already made many sweeping concessions, compromises and agreements including recognition of the right of Israel to exist, accepting a truncated territory with autonomous rule under the overall sovereignty of Israel, a demilitarised state of Palestine without the right to defend itself, receiving less than 100 percent of the land in the West Bank, recognising the annexation of Palestinian land for existing Jewish settlements, return of fewer Palestinian refugees than were made homeless by Arab-Israeli War. Many of these agreements and concessions are downright humiliating. But there is a limit to the point where even a defeated enemy can be pushed against his will. By refusing Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem Arafat has been made to face the Israelis with his back to the wall. In exasperation and righteous indignation he had to say, enough is enough. The American President in his eagerness to please the Jewish vote bank (both for Al Gore and Hillary Clinton) has deliberately refused to recognise the unfairness and unjust nature of the end game of the peace process. Instead of being sympathetic to the Palestinian cause he has not hesitated to publicly express his displeasure against Yasser Arafat. To add insult to injury, he praised Ehud Barak for his "understanding of the historic moment and for courageous-

ness." Immediately after the official announcement about the failure of Camp David Summit and Clinton's public utterances Newsweek magazine wryly commented that "Arafat's defiance was fleeting and even illusory."

The bloody clash that erupted last week spontaneously on the streets of Gaza and the West Bank and is continuing now into the second week, though on a lower scale, proves beyond any shadow of doubt that Arafat's (Palestinians) moment of defiance was neither fleeting nor illusory. The daredevil defiance shown by the unarmed Palestinian youths braving death and injury looks not only set to continue but is likely to become more violent and bloody than in the past leaving little doubt about its grim reality. The Palestinians have already shed much blood for their birthright and they may not hesitate to shed more, now that anger and resentment is boiling over and their national psyche has been rudely hurt. They just cannot submit to any more of indignities and insult.

Arafat has fulfilled his historic role. Being the underdog he may not have emerged as a statesman at the Summit but neither have President Clinton acquitted himself as a successful mediator nor Ehud Barak has been a man of the hour taking some political risk for the sake of permanent peace for his people.

As the land in Palestine and Israel reverberates to the sound of pitched battles, the Biblical prophecy of it becoming the final battleground draws closer to reality. If Armageddon really takes place now it is sure to engulf not only two peoples and a limited area but can become a conflagration on a scale that is unthinkable. There may even be a modified version where it translates into death and destruction wreaked against the enemies anywhere in the world. It will be futile and delusory to term those as terrorist attacks because for the victims of injustice those will make the difference between honour and humiliation. With that prospect looming overhead, few Israelis will be able to go to bed to sleep peacefully. Their friends may not also feel safe and secured. It is a nightmare that can still be avoided. The stakes for everyone involved in this impending doom is too high to be taken of lightly or to be cynical about.

"The Israeli-Palestinian conflict knows no status quo. It can move forward toward peace or can slide back into turmoil." These were the words uttered by the American President before the Camp David Summit. Only a person long on rhetoric and short on substance can make such remarks.

Armageddon, Now

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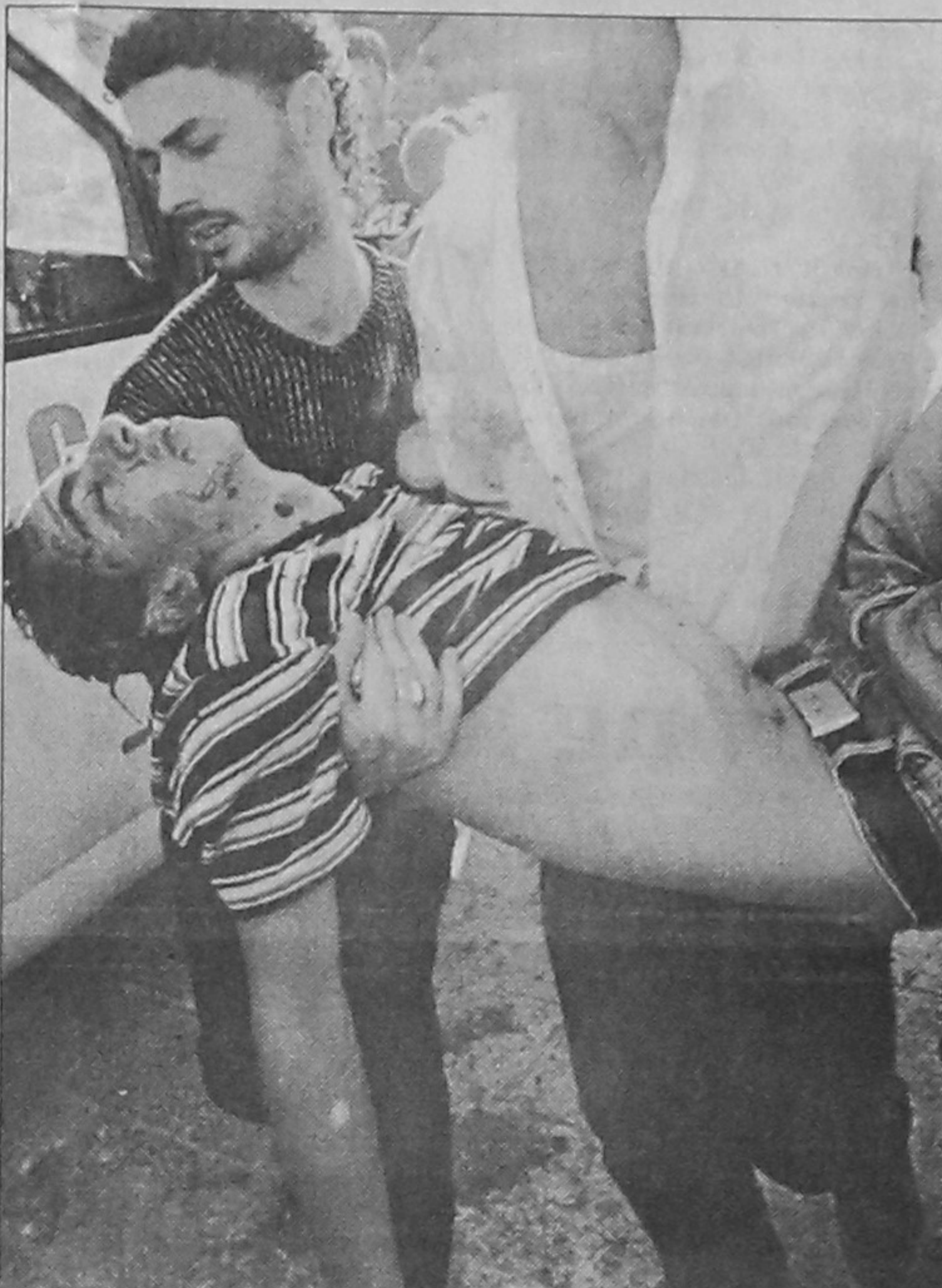
IN MY VIEW

Hasnat Abdul Hye



ruins underground and remnants of an old wall, East Jerusalem has one of Islam's holiest Mosque -- Al-Aqsa. It is an active mosque revered by Muslims all over the world and not only by the Palestinians. In terms of history, Al-Aqsa is not a post-modern construction either; it too is hallowed by the long passage of time.

existed before June 4, 1967. Israel has treated with contempt the UN Resolutions for over thirty years. By insisting to retain East Jerusalem Israel is flouting a fresh world opinion as expressed through the UN. If a superpower like America supports such defiance of UN Resolution the World Body will be left



One of the Palestinians shot dead by Israeli police at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque compound.

Friday Mailbox

Name-dropping in politics

Sir, Hanging a name by the roadside or cementing it on a building has become a passionate pastime in politics in Bangladesh. It is the new politics in a new nation only three decades old, hence the over-enthusiasm spills over.

In the process, the basic principle of the idea involved with a personality fails to get identified properly, and side-tracks, considering that public memory is short. The later non-virtue is responsible for the vice pointed out above. Thus it is a vicious circle, encouraging the sycophants to fill in this artificial vacuum. And in the process the latter become famous too, due to the mileage obtained through the monotonous propaganda machine.

One central machine cannot undertake this publicity job, as reverse polarity is involved; hence the waves change with the changing regimes. It is claimed that ritualism is a product of the rich fallout from the famous, and the PR Geiger counters should register satisfactory numbers.

Memory is a mystery mistress, with unpredictable recalls and blanks. A name, like a coin, should pile up in a library or museum, or roll on the tongue to maintain currency? It is a noble occupation, so long it does not become a preoccupation.

It is all about leaving a mark on the pages of history, and in the formative minds of the younger and new generations. As if facts were not enough, there are true facts, and real facts, just for emphasis. Now, in this computerised age, we have virtual reality also, and this high-tech is also being applied in Dhaka. It is a bit confusing, allocating the rightful places in history; and it becomes complex with successive subjective evaluations. How to politically neutralise the national leaders?

The compilation of the factual history of the birth of Bangladesh is yet to be completed, even after thirty years. To whom the credit should go? It is a premature question, as the debit audit is not yet complete. Then comes the harder part: putting colour into black and white.

We have become experts at negative evaluations, thanks to the turbulence of history, which resulted in breaks in continuity the politicians do not like. The eddy currents refuse to subside. Personality and charisma tend to cling, like the leeches (including the blood-sucking part). In the LDCs, R&D on political deterrents is not advanced, hence the delay in removing the spots.

Sustainable credibility is this what is being sought? In the case of commercial goods, the brand names are hammered into the consumers' brains through high intensity advertisement and publicity campaigns, for instant identification of the logo. What's the difference between a leading product and a leading personality? There is a basic common factor service. When serviceability falls, the popularity is eroded.

The target is the same - the people. Here QC or quality control comes in: both qualitative and quantitative. One has to do with sales, other with the service. Service involves human factors; which, in most cases, fall short of the humane factor. Thus a loop is formed: servicing those who provide service.

Readers of the Greek classics are familiar with the large number of anonymous quotations which have survived two millenniums. Ultimately, it is the genuine idea or the eternal truth which stands

the test of time, rather than who said it first. Wisdom is impersonal, while charisma is personalised; hence the latter needs a spinning mechanism to churn out the cream. It is a daunting task to fill in the huge black holes of illiteracy and poverty. Heroes and hero-worshipping are leisure-hour activities, but when the impoverished worshippers can relax, and stand and stare?

Alif Zabr
 Dhaka

Uniformed informality

Sir, The letter Uniformed men on NCBs (DS October 6) has a point. Election time is near, and all fronts have to be kept friendly. Also, the time are hostile and unfriendly (the politicians are responsible for the controlled chaos), therefore untoward preoccupations have to be monitored and preempted, and contingency measures have to be in place.

Our bright politicians forget that they also have to eat their own pie, which may or may not be the proverbial humble pie. What happens to a candle when both the ends are burning? (The central solid matter evaporates.) The next course (for the afternoon political tea party) is to have the cake and eat it too. But the votes are indigestible when rigged.

Unmoved Voter
 Dhaka

General election

Sir, According to the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Jatiya Sangsad is elected for five years duration. But due to the impatient behaviour of our opposition, a suggestion for reducing the tenure to four years like the USA has been raised by many quarters.

The JS is not regularly attended by the opposition members and the ruling party seems to be unsatisfied with the above suggestion. Therefore a constitutional amendment for the said purpose could not be made. The present government is in office for more than four years. So there is no more time for the purpose.

If the next election is held in time, the time will fall in the high monsoon period of July to September. This is not a good period for nationwide election in Bangladesh due to floods etc. Besides, we know the Upazila and City Corporation elections are also pending and that should also be held during the reign of the Caretaker Government to avoid rigging and opposition boycott. Furthermore, there is an opposition demand for earlier election and if the government does not comply there is a chance of political unrest.

Considering all these factors, I think it would be wise for the government to step down earlier so that the Caretaker Government may arrange for the General, Upazila and City Corporation elections simultaneously in the next winter in between two Eids or just after the Eid-ul Azha.

M.A.S. Molla
 Member, BAAS
 Dhaka

The Burning Question between Learning and Earning

Perhaps, the civilisation was seeded in man's quest for equilibrium where he will not compromise living for livelihood. While livelihood is primarily concerned with the pleasures and fineries that go with the body, living is concerned with the pleasures and fineries of the soul, its refinement with moderation, justice, courage, freedom and truth.

WHAT is the difference between learning and earning? Bible says, "Get learning with a great sum of money, and get much gold by her." Which means you spend money first to learn, so that it will help you earn money later. So, can we say that learning is an investment in knowledge, which is an investment in earning? Perhaps yes. The common sense is that learning is when you spend money to know, and earning is when others spend money on you for what you know.

To Montesquieu, the great French philosophical writer, learning was an analgesic to pain. According to him, there was no pain on earth that an hour's reading couldn't heal. The psychologists might want to find a link between Montesquieu's observation and their own definition of learning. If learning is the alteration of behaviour as a result of individual experience, the French philosopher had learned not to respond to a painful experience by virtue of reading.

That means, when an organism can perceive and change its behaviour it is said to learn. A learned person, therefore, is not someone who crams himself with knowledge but also uses that knowledge to shape his behaviour. In other words, a learned man cannot only preach, but he also practises what he preaches. Learning theorists from the 17th through the mid-20th century had in common a desire to demonstrate scientifically that certain universal principles governed all learning processes and could explain how and why they worked. By the 1970s, however, the psychologists arrived at a conclusion that a single theory of learning might not be appropriate. One of the last attempts to

integrate all knowledge of psychology into a single, grand theory was made by Clark L. Hull who argued that stimulus-response activities promoted by reward was the essential aspect of learning.

One way to look is that earning is a reward system for learning. In his reflections on the education of children, Montaigne showed explicit concern with the training of a gentleman, and emphasised the need to avoid what he called pedantry. But this man of learning didn't practise what he preached. At the age of thirty-seven, he took one of the major decisions of his life: his retirement. He sold his post as magistrate and withdrew to his library on his father's estate. He did quite the opposite, and used learning as a reward system for earning.

Thus Montaigne had adopted the lifestyle of Seneca's "constant man", who travels light through life and knows how to limit his desires. Now that formulates a crucial question between learning and earning. Which of the two regulates the other?

Henry David Thoreau answered that question saying that a wise man will only be useful as a man. Can we judge the success of learning with the size of earning or vice versa? How much money one makes is as dependent on learning as the

thunderbolt is on the bleating of a goat. Many learned men struggled for solvency in their lives, whereas many affluent men showed no inkling of learning. It has been a tendency only amongst the modern men to ardently correlate learning with earning, while neglecting his own transformation in the process. In as much as the Renaissance had shifted the focus from the God-centred universe of the Middle

doesn't learn much? In other words, how do we assess a learner who is not a good earner or an earner who is not a good learner? That line between the two seems to have blurred as the passion for earning dominates the passion for learning, where knowledge is worth its market price. What happened to the absolute value of learning, learning which brings enlightenment to the soul if not enrichment of the wallet?

If today teachers are slighted by traders, in other words the learning man is overshadowed by his fellow earning being, it has a lot to do with the encroachment of mind by money. And that is because a life of consumption is preferred to a life of contemplation. To say it more aptly, understanding of life is less important than enjoying its comforts, the cash subverting the elements of conscience as wealth undercuts wisdom.

Does that mean the learning man is losing his place in society? The answer is no. The learning man is still there, but the purpose of his being is diminishing. And a lot of it has to do with shift in social values, which recognises affluence more than intellect, partly because the learning man has succumbed to the temptations of earning and partly because the earning man has

been dominating the precepts of learning. If we look at our private universities or vocational schools, the earning men are dictating the terms of learning, thereby tweaking the definition of "a useful man" to their advantage.

That brings us to the root of the intellectual movement, which started with humanism in the sixteenth century. History, ethics, poetry and rhetoric were considered particularly humane by Cicero and other Roman intellectuals as the primary emphasis of the Renaissance movement was to establish the dignity of man and make him, as the Greek philosopher Protagoras said, the measure of all things.

So, we arrive at the burning question. Has man made himself the measure of all things, or has he simply reduced himself to the role of a busybody, who measures all things around him? In a sense, that has been the biggest drawback of modern education, which fails to give man his sense of proportion. What is the purpose of life? Is it to gather knowledge, or is it to earn money? Perhaps, the civilisation was seeded in man's quest for equilibrium where he will not compromise living for livelihood. While livelihood is primarily concerned with the pleasures and fineries that go with the body, living is concerned with the pleasures and fineries of the soul, its refinement with moderation, justice, courage, freedom and truth.

Instead, the fundamental tenet of living is now livelihood, everyone desperately trying to keep up with the Jones. No wonder the civilisation is reverting to its original chaos, because man is responding to the primal instincts of the hunters and gatherers once again.

CROSSTALK

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan



Of course there are those, who will argue that people learn all the time and need not always pay for it. But we are talking about learning not as a vehicle of experience but as a virtual of exegesis. After all, true success of learning is to promote perception, not presumption. One must learn for the light of knowledge, not for the height of knavery.

How do we distinguish between a learned man who doesn't earn much and an earning man who