

Bilateral Relations and Domestic Politics

THERE is never any dearth of exchange of harsh words between our ruling and the opposition parties. Starting from being called thieves and terrorists to being accused of murders, name calling has crossed all bounds of decency and good taste.

Regrettably failing to attract the public with their own programmes they drag neighbours and regional countries into our politics to serve their narrow ends. To take a historical view on this subject it has to be said that Awami League has been a far greater victim of this type of politics than any other political party both in Bangladesh and in the pre-liberation Pakistan.

Following the assassination of Bangabandhu in 1975 till 1996, the whole state machinery was used to 'prove' that the party that led us during our War of Liberation was nothing more than an Indian stooge.

Perhaps nowhere in the world is the domestic politics of an independent country dominated so much by references to external links. This we consider to be the most unhealthy aspect of our politics.

Case No 1: On September 19 a news was flashed in the print media (some covered it on front-page) that one Abdul Latif Tipu, son of Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan, by manipulating a forged deed forcibly occupied more than four acres of land worth about Tk 12 crore at Chandmari Road in Lalkhan Bazar of Chittagong city.

This we think to be a dangerous game. As a part of the modern world the less we indulge in it the better. While both parties are playing to the gallery for their respective vote banks, they are inevitably affecting our bilateral relations with both India and Pakistan.

Mosquito Menace

IN spite of a plethora of reports about the mosquito menace looming large over the capital city the commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation responsible for control and eradication of this scourge has emphatically denied that such a situation prevails.

We are well into the month of October and the next month is also known to be the peak time for mosquito breeding. If efforts are not initiated now to eradicate mosquito then the citizens will be thrown into uncertain conditions once again.

It is very amusing that we have to write such comments every year to remind and reactivate the DCC as if the organisation was new and the Mayor was born yesterday.

Palestinian Towns in Flames—Peace Process in Tatters

Now the US has to act rapidly. It must immediately ask Barak to stop military action against Palestinians and Arafat to prevail on his people to stop violence. In the meantime Kofi Annan and other world leaders in the region should continue their efforts to have the release of three Israeli soldiers from Hezbollah. Enough is enough.

deaths and injuries took place. This was a veritable war against the Palestinians but the Israeli military sources said it was a "symbolic warning" to the Palestinians.

This was the most irrational decision on the part of Prime Minister Barak who acted like the Chief of Staff and not like the Prime Minister of a country. Everybody would denounce such savage killings of plain clothes security men though they had no business to be there but this does not call for savage military attacks at a time when the peace

After nearly twelve days of violence and over 90 deaths most of them Palestinians Palestinian rage was at the highest point and they were up for revenge killing. They got the opportunity when Palestinian police rounded up four Israeli plain clothes security men who were unauthorisedly moving in the area of the town Ramallah which is fully under Palestinian control.

This was immediately denounced by President Arafat but did not satisfy the Israeli Prime Minister. He ordered the Israeli Security Forces to attack Palestinian military and military related targets. The helicopter gunships were used and several Palestinian police stations including a post near Arafat's residence were attacked. Thus some of the Palestinian cities and towns were in flames. Several



Spotlight on Middle East Muslehuddin Ahmad

negotiations were on and peace was apparently around the corner. Ariel Sharon wanted to destroy the peace process and Ehud Barak, being a former military man fell into Sharon's trap and hence the debacle. The people around the world who are



A missile fired by an Israeli helicopter gunship hits a police station in the West Bank town of Ramallah 12 October 2000. -- AFP photo/Jamal Aruri

Sharon's visit to the Haram Sharif. He has now invited the same Ariel Sharon for a national unity government: what a disaster! This clearly shows that he has struck off "peace" with the Palestinians from his agenda. If Ariel Sharon wants to pursue his evil design he may not accept Barak's offer at this stage and may like to finish Barak completely domestically.

Unfortunately, President Arafat's political calculations also could not gauge the intensity of the heat Ariel Sharon's visit would generate and apparently did not quickly go for stopping the violence after the initial outburst of anger at the end of Friday prayer on September 28 in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. And hence this terrible crisis at a very crucial moment when peace process was almost at its final stage.

Earlier, Prime Minister Barak gave 48-hour ultimatum to Arafat for stopping the violence, else end of the peace process and appropriate strong response from Israel. Such an ultimatum was quite inappropriate for a peace maker. A real peace maker cannot

threaten to end the peace process regardless of what others do against it. However, the ultimatum was allowed to pass by due to the pressure from President Clinton and the international community. But ultimately situation could not be saved and Israel acted as it often does because of its ego of superior military strength. Barak acted on the ultimatum though for a different reason which nullified all good work done during the last couple of days by Secretary General Kofi Annan, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, British Foreign Secretary Rabin Cook, EU's Javier Salana who were in the region to contain the violence. But all the diplomatic advice and work done by them were in vain as both sides acted irrationally, though Israel's military action was the worst of all. Israeli action showed total disrespect to the leaders of the UN, Russia, Britain and the EU and the Scandinavia and other countries involved in the negotiating process.

Now the US has to act rapidly. It must immediately ask Barak to stop military action against Palestinians and Arafat to prevail on his people to stop violence. In the meantime Kofi Annan and other world leaders in the region should continue their efforts to have the release of three Israeli soldiers from Hezbollah. Enough is enough.

President Clinton was expected to reach the region within a couple of days. Now his visit appears absolutely essential to bring the two parties together to contain the present volatile situation. Maybe the parties will not be in a mood to discuss peace, but at least they should be ready to return to the negotiating table as soon as the situation cools down. Barak should be advised and, if necessary, persuaded not to go for a unity government now involving the main villain Ariel Sharon. With Ariel Sharon the peace process will be dead.

OPINION

No More Land Grabbing, Please

AR Shamsul Islam

Case No 2: Not long time back we came across in the dailies another news that son of another Deputy Minister of Dhaka having illegally occupied a big plot of land in Uttara that originally belonged to 'Rajuk' took steps to construct a shopping mall. Owing to print media's uproar the minister's son had to abandon the scheme.

Case No 3: Still a few months back Chief Whip Abul Hasnat's son caused a sensation by forcibly occupying a building at Kalabagan of which he took on rent a room. For the same reason of newspapers' unsparring reports and further for the building owner's risky guts of standing bold against the venom of the Chief Whip's son the latter had to retire from the spot leaving off his occupation.

Case No 4: The site originally allotted for a 'Shishu Park' at Khilgaon of the metropolis has reportedly come to the occupation of Deputy Minister Saber Hossain Choudhury on an alleged plea of constructing so-called 'Sabuj-Moti' hospital.

Case No 1: On September 19 a news was flashed in the print media (some covered it on front-page) that one Abdul Latif Tipu, son of Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan, by manipulating a forged deed forcibly occupied more than four acres of land worth about Tk 12 crore at Chandmari Road in Lalkhan Bazar of Chittagong city. A housing society "Shujan Abashik Kallyan Sangstha" claimed that the land in question was their purchased property that was grabbed by the minister's son aided by armed goons. The society men told that they filed a case pending with the second Judge's Court of Chittagong and sent a fax to the Prime Minister and published an advertisement in a daily seeking her intervention. But no response from her side had come till that time.

Further, a diary with Khulshi thana was lodged against the minister's son by one Nazimuddin, brother to former S P Delwar, alleging that the accused with a gang of armed men tried to erect a boundary wall on their land. Police, however, dismantled the unlawful construction of

minister's son. Case No 2: Not long time back we came across in the dailies another news that son of another Deputy Minister of Dhaka having illegally occupied a big plot of land in Uttara that originally belonged to 'Rajuk' took steps to construct a shopping mall. Owing to print media's uproar the minister's son had to abandon the scheme.

'Shishu Park'. The works ministry handed the land over to the city authority to implement the project. When in 1986 the then President Ershad suddenly declared that the Ansar headquarters would be erected on that site strong local protests sparked off. Thereupon Ershad came to visit the site to see for himself the actual situation and judging the sentiment of the people of the locality he committed that 'Shishu Park' would be set up there. In 1996 the ministry concerned reallocated the land for a 'Shishu Park' and redelivered it to the City Corporation.

Who doesn't know that the Dhaka city is in an astounding crisis of open space for children's play and recreation. Liquidating the repeatedly approved project of a 'Shishu Park' is attended with grave pain.

There are more systematic and stray cases of ruling party's appetite for land grabbing across the country. In rural areas it is a grand combination of Middle Age feudalistic conquests and Modern Time's typical Bangladesh administrative diabolism. In a book titled 'An Enquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities

in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act' by Dr Abul Barkat, a professor of economics of Dhaka University, it is diagnosed that over 44 per cent of the occupants of vested properties are affiliated with the ruling Awami League. The figure was 71 per cent for the then ruling BNP occupants of the vested property in 1995. This is symbolic of how the vast majority of the occupants of the vested property align themselves with the ruling party to secure political protection.

Political parties now-a-days have allegedly degenerated into instruments of satisfying personal greed and interest by flouting laws of the land. Miscreants have crowded into the parties' cadre, preferably that of the ruling one. The party leadership has ignored, and sometimes encouraged, this influx in total disregard of the ethics and norms of a political party. Probably the leaders are swept by the so-called negative arguments that since the rival party does have armed cadre in its rank and file it is the ground reality that they too must have like counterparts in their party to match, and preferably overpower, their opponents. The incoming terrorists are aware of

their indispensability in the party structure and as such never fall short of charging maximum price for their induction.

In recent years a fetish for material enjoyment and aggrandisement is all over with the partymen, barring a few. In our society of today means is never questioned, reaching the goal by hook or by crook is the sole concern. That is why the wilful bank defaulters, fake industrialists, shameless political peddlers parade the length and breadth of the society in full glory. Politics is perhaps counted as the best and quickest means of reaching that damn goal. To go to power means to capture all keys to material successes: Administration is at beck and call, bank ready to advance loans, police on toes to rough up the opponents.

More important is that in Bangladesh political power renders one to be immune from being legally accused, let alone punished, of an offence committed by him. This scope of immunity attracts the wrong-doers to herd into ruling camp as a safe haven. To grab new booties as well as to retain old ones alignment with the ruling party has become an urgency for the aspirants.

Recently in a party meeting the Awami League chief and Prime Minister warned the guardians of the unruly sons to control their wards. She cautioned that the party would not allow its image to be tarnished by the activities of a few members.

Of course there resides in the party a saner and wiser section that feels disturbed at the grabbing activities of the partymen particularly minister's sons and minister themselves and does not fail to gauge what consequences do such activities of grabbing bear on the future of the party. The electors do certainly abhor the grabbers and resent that the party administration has shied away from taking appropriate measures to contain them. Growingly disillusioned with the party the people may turn to giving it a befitting reply in the next national polls. Holier-than-thou benefit may not hold good beyond a certain period. The AL leadership should not miss reading this reality before time runs out.

The writer is retired Principal, Gout Mohila College, Pabna

Let it be Rule of Law and Not Personal Rule, Please

Tayeb Husain

There is big difference between the rule of law and the personal rule, as far as running the administration of a country is concerned. In medieval societies the kings and the queens were the rulers and their personal rules and regulations were the only basis of running a government. Gone are the days when a king or a queen could formulate, order and get the law executed as per his or her whims. That sort of power today is unthinkable in a civilised society. However, for many third world countries the case is not much different even today and the medieval culture still prevails and remains predominant in certain cases. Bangladesh's case could be cited as an excellent example of this phenomenon.

We have written rules and regulations that colonial powers introduced in our country but in practice often it is not the rules of law but personal rules that dominate many decision making processes and sadly, nobody seems to be taking any notice of it. Just one example will suffice to prove my point and clearly indicate the sort of personal rule I am talking about.

As per a recent news in The Daily Star, the Prime Minister is said to have ordered the Public Service Commission to hold supplementary Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination to fill up the job quota (30% for members of the freedom fighters' and martyred families. I consider by this directive rule of law has been

replaced by personal rule and constitutional obligation has been violated.

Freedom fighters and martyrs are honourable people. Any freedom fighter or martyr who fought and sacrificed his or her life did so never expecting any reward. The word 'sacrifice' is godly and holy, no man or woman of honour sacrifices life expecting any compensation or monetary gain. The grateful nation, however, always honour their freedom fighters and martyrs and do take care of them if they are alive and remember them with high respect if they are dead. A living freedom fighter often receives honour from the grateful nation for his or her suffering whereas a martyr is remembered fondly and with

respect. Monetary compensation is given to a freedom fighter and to martyr's nearest kith and kin, i.e. father, mother and minor children, if and when it is necessary to do so. This sort of obligation a grateful nation always complies with as a pious duty. However, there is also a time limit for such help. No help can be or should be forever beyond a reasonable period.

Long thirty years have passed since our freedom fighters fought and martyrs sacrificed their lives. Their children are now well in their late 20s and early 30s. Should they need or be offered any compensation or special privilege now? It is desirable that the jobs in the public sector should be available only to the

best and the most competent individuals. Merit and quality shall be the criterion and not anything else for employment in national services.

The PM's order should be considered also from the constitutional point of view. If any selection for jobs in the public sector must be considered, for whatever reason it could be, the simple rule should be an adaptation of law by the national parliament.

In a civilised society, the national parliament makes laws and the executive branch, through the public sector employees, runs the country through the existing laws of the land. A PM cannot and should not make law and run the country as

her or his personal estate. If and when a government does so, it violates the rule of law and the leader who lets the government act in this way, imposes personal rule. That against the norm of democratic society.

As I said before, it is not PM Hasina only, each of her predecessors had tried to rule the country now and then by personal rules. This practice must stop and rule of law must be established in letter and spirit. The sooner the nation understands the need of this rule of law the better, then smoother the road shall be to justice and fairness for every individual and the society at large.

Littering, another common environmental problem of our society has number of negative effect. Littering on the streets makes it unsafe and unhygienic for the pedestrians. Litter in the drain blocks sewage. And when it rains heavily, water cannot flow through the drain and roads are flooded. I hope people would get conscious about these environmental degradation and do something concrete about it.

particular degree holders (like Fishery, Engineering, Medical, Agriculture). Our government often takes several projects like agro-forestry, social forestry, roadside plantation etc for the expansion of forest cover including the socio-economic development of the villagers. The forestry graduates are especially skilled about these. Hence, there is no alternative of forestry graduates in BCS (Forest) cadre. Therefore, the vacant posts of Forest Department should be fulfilled by forestry graduates only.

Md Ilut Mish Khulna

Stop this pollution

Sir, The increasing noise pollution and littering is indeed a concern for the country. Now-a-

days, the horns used by vehicles are exceeding the legal limit of sound decibels. Hydraulic horns, though illegal are being used by buses and trucks. These affect everyone--school children, patients, pedestrian etc.

Littering, another common environmental problem of our society has number of negative effect. Littering on the streets makes it unsafe and unhygienic for the pedestrians. Litter in the drain blocks sewage. And when it rains heavily, water cannot flow through the drain and roads are flooded. I hope people would get conscious about these environmental degradation and do something concrete about it.

Azfarul Islam Global Issues Club Sunbeams Senior School

Saving time

Sir, Political activities in the third world countries including Bangladesh run through public meeting procession, torch procession etc. This backdated political activities cause lawlessness, political instability, killing of mass people and even political leaders. It also wastes our valuable time. In this regard, I propose to utilise technology in politics. Instead of public meetings, procession etc we can use radio, TV for political purpose i.e. for political programmes.

Will our political leaders think over this proposal? I believe if this could be implemented we could utilise our time in worthy way, and law and order situation would also improve.

Md Hassanal Alam 10A Green Road Dhaka

To the Editor ...

Women seats in JS

Sir, Much has been written in national dailies and discussed in various seminars, meetings etc on the above matter. We know that the provision of reserved seats for women was incorporated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh as a measure to elevate the status of women in our national life. The other such constitutional and legal measures were the quota system in jobs for women, freedom fighters and tribal people.

Now it has been realised by various women's organisations and others that the provision of women MPs selected by the elected members (who are overwhelmingly males) cannot be a respectable system for the fellow women. The observation is, nevertheless, a right one. Most of the selected women MPs have been regarded as mere sets of ornaments in the Parliament. There-

fore women should need to be elected directly if they are to perform the task of real MPs.

Thus it will be better if both the Position and Opposition come to a consensus not to extend the earlier provision of women seats in the JS. The best way, however, would be to enhance the number of reserved seats for women to half of the 300, i.e., 150 and the remaining 150 seats might be reserved for males. Two adjacent constituencies may be combined to one for the purpose. Each of such 150 constituencies may elect one male and one female MP. The other suggestion of increasing the number of constituencies by 100 or more cannot be supported because the quantity does not do any good, instead the increased number will simply eat up our national exchequer only.

M.A.S. Molla Member, BAAS, Dhaka

Relevance

Sir, For various reasons, forest cover of Bangladesh is dwindling at an alarming rate. For environmental balance, every country requires at least 25 per cent forest of its total area. But in Bangladesh the forest cover is not more than 16 per cent. In order to improve the situation and for the proper management of the remaining forest cover BSC Hons in Forestry is offered by some universities (CU; KU; SUST). Unfortunately, graduates of this subject are neglected to forest related jobs. For BCS (forest) Cadre, the forestry graduates have to compete with some other non-technical degree holders like physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, soil science etc. But such is not applicable to other professions as in other professions vacancies are fulfilled by the