

Attack on hartal pickets

What was the minister doing in the street?

WE opposed hartals in the past as we opposed the one called last Thursday. But we cannot condone the attack that was carried out on pro-hartal pickets by a group of ruling party activists last Thursday. While the hartal passed off peacefully throughout the country it was only one point in the capital city where violence occurred. Why did violence occur in only one place? If the organisers were to be blamed then it would have occurred in other places also. The incident becomes more serious because the attackers belonged to the group led by a sitting state minister. Though the minister denies any knowledge of who the wrong doers were, hundreds of eyewitnesses and the photographs published in most of the national dailies clearly prove that it was Maya's men who did the attacking.

We are therefore forced to conclude that the attack on the 11-party alliance procession was pre-planned and deliberate. We are further forced to conclude that the presence of a state minister indicates that it was officially sanctioned. We condemn this attack on peaceful demonstrators and demand that the attackers be punished. We also demand that the head of the government asks her minister as to what he was doing on the streets instead of attending his office (10 a.m. to 1 p.m. is prime office time). The minister's denial does not exonerate him of his involvement with the gangsters who carried out the attack.

We express our serious concern at this violation of the Constitutional right of mass demonstration of the 11-party alliance. The propensity to deal with political opponents with physical force is increasingly on the rise on all sides, especially by the ruling party. This tendency is antithetical to democracy and we urge our political leaders to reign in their musclemen otherwise our democracy will turn into a farce. There is no place of violence in free expression of public opinion.

Cinema ransacked

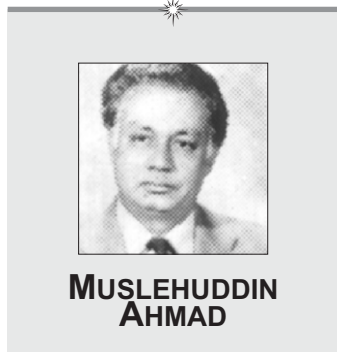
What options do we offer youth?

FAILING to get tickets for the rare screening of a popular Hindi film, as part of an international film festival, several thousand young fans went on the rampage, damaging the hall and nearby vehicles on Wednesday last. The police finally quelled the disturbance, but the cinema house has cancelled performances. This was the second unfortunate episode in the previous week at this venue.

While we condemn the rowdiness in no uncertain terms, we must stress that mere closure of the hall is not going to solve the problem. The young fans waited for a long time, only to discover the show was sold out, allegedly because ticket touts had made bulk procurements. Knowing they had a crowd-puller, why did the management allow bulk sales, and fail to beef up security measures in advance? We urge the authorities to investigate the matter, and take steps to avert future recurrences.

These incidents highlight the frustrations of youth in our inner city areas, which offer them virtually no wholesome options of public entertainment. Young people are turning increasingly to unhealthy avenues of temporary release. Nearly two lakh young boys and girls are reportedly addicted to the contraband syrup, phensidyl, while the actual number of addicts may be vastly more. The authorities must clamp down comprehensively on the trade in drugs. At the same time, the case to make Dhaka conducive to healthy living, must become a top priority, for the sake of our young people in particular.

With no peace deal Barak appears sure to face defeat



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

Prime Minister Barak of Israel squandered the mandate and the opportunities he got from Israeli people during his last election by suddenly resigning as the PM. He fumbled and tumbled repeatedly in the peace negotiations starting from last Camp David to Taba (Egypt). President Arafat also has to share the blame partly as he also wasted much of the time by failing to take decisions on the next moves.

A day before President Clinton left White House he made fervent appeals to the people and leaders of both Israel and Palestine. He said, "You are closer today than ever before to ending your 100-year-long struggle for peace and normalcy. Don't give up on the pursuit of peace..." To the Palestinian people he specifically said, "I remain convinced that despite these difficulties and tragic days, both you and your Israeli partners will find a way to move from the logic of war and confrontation to the logic of peace and cooperation. And that, together, you will bring peace to this Holy Land, sacred to Moslems, Jews, and Christians alike." Undoubtedly he was committed to peace in the

Middle East and worked hard for it. But he was unable to complete the task despite his best efforts. Sharon is to remain mainly responsible for the disruption of the on-going peace process. If any peace ever lands in the Middle East, Bill Clinton should be given the due credit and honoured accordingly.

President Bush has just taken over. He would certainly remain busy, at least for some time, with America's internal affairs including sagging economy, abortion, education. He has to give particular atten-

would spread all over the area with terrible intensity as Sharon is seen as a ruthless murderer and anti-Arab. Saddam would get a boost and Syria would go for war preparations. The international community and particularly Europe has also to take all these into consideration. Therefore major political and strategic changes are likely in the M-E with Sharon as PM in Israel.

However, left to themselves, the Israeli and Palestinian leaders continued to work on the parameters put by the former US President

Then came the suggestion for a meeting between Arafat and Barak at Sweden. This was also called off after Arafat made an "angry" speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. This speech was made by Arafat at a seminar on "Peace making to peace building". Arafat of course said the things that have happened and have been happening on the ground. He talked about Israel waging a "savagely and barbaric war" against the Palestinian people. But that was not the venue or occasion to release

This was more important as the present approach is to internationalize the peace negotiations with greater European and direct UN involvement. Indeed, there was some changes in the attitude of present Israeli negotiating team too. Israeli Foreign Minister reportedly said that Israel was now looking for more European participation in the peace process.

In any case Barak should not have been so sensitive about Arafat's speech; his interest should

now and this may help the meeting if this at all takes place.

But the most important is whether Barak is ready to agree to Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem including the Al Aqsa compound though Western Wall and adjacent Jewish areas could remain under Jewish sovereignty through agreed special arrangements for full security of both Israelis and Palestinians. Apparently Israeli negotiating team indicated the possibility of such an agreement as this was also reflected in the statement of Abu Mousa, Egyptian Foreign Minister who spoke in Davos seminar. He mentioned about open Jerusalem with capital of both Israel and Palestinian State and that this would 'close the file of animosity between Israeli and Palestinian people'.

Any way, this seems to be the last chance for any kind of peace in the area. Under the present political scenario, Barak is set to lose Prime Ministerial election on February 6, if no peace deal of some sort could be struck and placed before the Israeli public for endorsement. Sharon still has 20 points lead over Barak. Barak also did not allow Shimon Peres who had some lead over Sharon to contest the election in his place. February 6 was the last date for withdrawal. Indeed, Barak has reconfirmed his intention to contest. Sharon will certainly be a disaster not only for Israel but also for the entire area. And such a disaster may not spare the rest of the world.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The most important is whether Barak is ready to agree to Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem including the Al Aqsa compound though Western Wall and adjacent Jewish areas could remain under Jewish sovereignty through agreed special arrangements for full security of both Israelis and Palestinians.

tion to his divided nation with a view to working "to build a single nation of justice and opportunity". His remark "When we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side" indicates his vision for the area and the urgency that he would attach to it. However, it appears that Israel will get less favoured treatment from President Bush as he has to have a balanced approach to the M-E politics. With Sharon as PM in Israel the political scenario in M-E would undergo considerable changes. Already signs are there. The tension has developed in Jordan with Sharon's remark that Yasser Arafat would establish Palestinian State in Jordan. Egypt would be under pressure to change its present good relationship with Israel. Violence

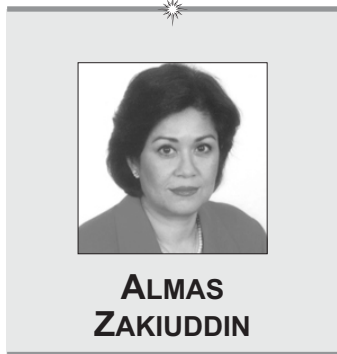
Clinton. Taba (a Red Sea resort) negotiations on Clinton's parameters brought high hopes. Every one involved in the peace process there said that "serious negotiations" were going on and a deal, if not the final agreement, was a possibility. The talks continued for about a week but suddenly were broken off under the instruction of PM Barak after two Israelis were killed near the West Bank town of Tul Karm though the Palestinian Authorities condemned the killing and agreed to help catch the killers. Here Barak lost precious time that could be used to clear up some of the issues that still divide them. Indeed, this went against his own interest as he is the one who needs the Peace Deal before the Prime Ministerial election on February 6.

such "anger". All these facts of atrocities against Palestinian people are known to all who attended the seminar. Therefore, the best course would have been to briefly refer to these unfortunate things and move on to what he has been doing to "make peace of the brave" and what he proposes now to do to bring peace in the area. This could have been in line with what Shimon Peres was talking about in his extempore speeches. He said he came here for wedding and not for divorce. Shimon Peres's approach was towards finding a solution and there Arafat could have given his well thought out proposals which the audience of international community could seriously consider while moving ahead with the peace process.

have been to continue the negotiations with a view to finding an acceptable peace deal that he could place before Israeli public. This was in his own personal interest too as only a good peace deal with enough security provisions could sway Israeli public opinion toward him. But again he lost some days.

Now he has changed his mind. Under the pressure from the Secretary General of the UN and some European leaders. Barak said he "will contemplate" a meeting if one could be arranged. Again it is proposed to be in Sharm-el-Sheikh with probably Egyptian President in the chair. In the meantime, Arafat also came under criticism from some European leaders for his untimely speech in Davos. Therefore he also softened his tone

They make the world go round



ALMAS ZAKIUDDIN

THEY can be your worst nightmare, or the joy of your life. Sometimes, children can be diabolically both. But it doesn't matter a jot. Children make the world go round, and there is nothing one can do about it.

When my first child came along, I was stunned to discover that he had to be fed every hour, on the hour, like clockwork. I implore you not to laugh at me, but this is the truth. Mine was the first baby in the immediate family, so the minuteness of his stomach and the infinite capacity of his lungs were something of a revelation for me.

My mother-in-law was too kind hearted to laugh outright, but she must have smiled inwardly as she watched me, a gauche 22-year-old with a prized B.A. degree that had taught me zilch about the demands of parenthood, as I tried to come to terms with my new role in life.

Infants often look like angels but how like mating wolves. When feed time appeared, I would recall my father's stories about surviving the Blitzkrieg in London during World War II. At least air raid sirens stop when the enemy has departed, is all I can say about those nightly raids

when my infant demanded, and I provided. There were nights when I seriously contemplated going out and buying a cow.

The good news is, of course, that infants become toddlers, and toddlers grow into young boys or girls, and they eventually grow into lanky teenagers who, in turn, are ultimately transformed into young adults. Parents plot along, making mistakes, trying in spite of all kinds of odds, to nurture and bring up their children to the best of their ability.

hadn't smoked so much, I would not have made it a habit, I suggested, in my defence. Come on, ma, they retorted, you've told us yourself that you started way back when you were in school, so don't kid us. You can't change facts.

Oops. Getting caught out by your children, is like a bald man complaining the wind is blowing into his hair. Don't try to lie to your children, they can smell a falsehood as quickly as a Doberman sniffs an intruder at the door.

ter-of-factly to the next name on the list. I sat there feeling as foolish as a child.

Actually, children aren't foolish, not as foolish as some adults. Left to themselves, they have terrific judgement about what is wrong and what is right, about people, about themselves, about the world around them.

Yes, they are impressionable, there lies their fragility. I do believe that parents can set their children on the wrong path, but I also believe

are perceptive. Something stinks, always, when anyone tries too hard. No child will take it lying down.

Step one is to push the food out of the mouth. Step two is to close the lips so tightly one needs a chainsaw to prise it open. Step three is to turn one's attention to another activity, like pelting the family dog or bua with helpings of rice or daal. Step four is to regurgitate a lot of soggy food on the parent's lap. Step five is to be allowed to go free, and to ignore the admonition that children

one treats a child, must change when that child grows up into a teenager, and then into an adult. But when that stage occurs, no one gives you any instructions. There are no feasibility studies, research papers or even peer examples to emulate, except as very rough guides that may not be applicable to you.

We often stupidly compare children. My second born, for instance, was never fat, unlike his older brother. It mattered little to me, because he ate well and was healthy, happy. At a birthday party one day, a young mother turned to me and said pointedly, "Poor boy, has he always been so thin?" I felt like a criminal but I shoved food into my poor child's mouth until he gagged the next day.

Peer pressure can motivate one, but so often in the wrong direction. It takes conviction and faith, to resist the temptation to compete mindlessly with others. Parents who brag about their "perfect" children are probably masking some awful truth. Children, after all, are going to become adults and if there are any "perfect" adults around, I would like to meet them some day.

What children do, as far as I am concerned, is that they give more than they take. They have taught me to laugh at myself, doubt and then believe in myself again. They have taught me to be honest, tolerant, flexible, practical. They have taught me never to underestimate an opponent. They have taught me how to work my computer, fix a fuse, appreciate Formula One racing, and the meaning of unconditional love. Above all, they have taught me that they, and not I, make the world go round.

IF YOU ASK ME

What children do, as far as I am concerned, is that they give more than they take. They have taught me to laugh at myself, doubt and then believe in myself again. They have taught me to be honest, tolerant, flexible, practical. They have taught me never to underestimate an opponent.

But in the process, parents change. And life is never the same again.

I used to smoke, as I might have told you before, and when both my boys were teenagers, they would try to stop me. One day my older son came home from school with a wad of cotton wool that had turned dark brown in the centre. He brandished it like a weapon under my nose, explaining that in his science class they had injected the cotton wool with cigarette smoke for six minutes or something and this had been the outcome. My lungs, he lectured me, were of that ugly colour and unless I stopped smoking soon, they would turn completely black.

I felt like crawling under a rock. Then, like a typically devious parent, I blamed the father whose first job had been with a company that manufactures cigarettes. If he

Like when parents spell words out, often under their breath, so that children cannot understand that the sweets are hidden in the shelf above the fridge. Mine would pretend they hadn't caught on, but later, when the sweets had disappeared, and I would accost them, they would smirk because they knew that I knew that they had seen through my feeble subterfuge.

In more serious instances, children have a sixth sense that can stunt the hair on a gorilla. I used to detest this particular friend of the family but never spoke badly of him, or so I believed. One day, when a guest list for a dinner party was being drawn up, the name of this friend came up. Before I could say anything, my younger son crossed it out. You hate the man, ma, everyone knows it, he said, turning mat-

that parents, themselves, can learn from their children.

One good move is to respect them, but never to underestimate their strength and resilience. This may not always work, but in my limited experience, one stands less chance of building an enduring relationship if one treats them like morons and mollycoddles them in cotton wool.

Some parents, especially in our upper middle class culture, fail to understand that their children are not going to die if they go without food for a few days. I am not joking.

I have seen mothers (and fathers, too) spend their entire lives worrying that their brats have not had enough to eat. They cajole, entice, pursue and torment them with food until the children practically gag. The children, on their part,

Step six is to run like mad and hide under the heaviest piece of furniture at the first sighting of a plate and spoon.

One wonders why parents fail to read the signs of contempt as clearly as children send them out? They don't want to be fed. There must be a reason. Maybe one is trying too hard. Maybe one should stand back, let the child go hungry, ask for more. There are millions of children around the world who cry themselves to sleep because they cannot get enough to eat. Why in the blazes don't poor children have eating disorders?

But the more daunting challenge is dealing with emotional needs. Few parents ever feel truly satisfied. The job of parenting has many distinct but uncharted stages of performance. The manner in which

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Appeal to the President

Unfortunately, some people in government do not want the President to contribute to the nation. Their intentions are crystal clear. Recently they have been making comments and statements regarding his resignation and early retirement, even through it is none of their business to speak out about the President's decision and authority. It is the President's discretion to stay or not to stay, according to our Constitution.

We appeal to the President to stick to his post until the last moment for the sake of the country. If he should retire, we would be half dead. We all wish the President the best of health and a sound state of mind.

Syed Sajjad Zoha

"Genuine Freedom Fighters"

While endorsing the letter "Genuine Freedom Fighters" from Dr S Nasrullah (The Daily Star, January 29), I would like to add to it.

We note a sudden interest in the welfare of the Freedom Fighters in the fourth year of the present regime. The official-level initiative appears to be a pre-election stunt.

The racket of politicising the issue of Freedom Fighters, who made sacrifices for the country, voluntarily, and not for any particular political party, must be condemned. If one political party calls a rally, the Freedom Fighters who are leaning (now) towards other parties cannot attend this one-party meeting. This is wrong. All meetings and deliberations must be neutral and non-political; and the government must be there as a facilitator.

The reservation of job quotas should have a time limit, as the surviving Freedom Fighters today are past middle age.

Retired service-holder
Dhaka

Equality Fund Seminar

I would like to draw the kind attention of the Hon'ble Minister for Finance on the Equity and Entrepreneurship Fund, advertised in the front page of the Daily Star by Bangladesh Bank Authority on 2nd January 2001. In para 2 (iii) of the advertisement it has been mentioned that the total cost of individual projects (including net-working capital) has to be not less than Taka 40.00 million that means Taka 4.00 crores. The reason for fixing the bottom line of the project cost of individual projects to Taka 4.00 crores by Bangladesh Bank Authority is not clear to many entrepreneurs who are interested to take advantage of such a fund.

It is understood that the fund has been placed by the Government under the control of Bangladesh Bank Authority to encourage more entrepreneurs to participate in the. It is, therefore, requested that the relevant authority of the Bangladesh Bank may kindly arrange a seminar in order to take the opinion of the experts on the proper utilization of the above fund. Such an important fund must not be left only to the decisions of the people who are not sufficiently experienced to appraise the proposals of the entrepreneurs because of the lack of sufficient knowledge on the relevant sectors.

Md Zahid Hossain,

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

Who will protect the people?



STAR PHOTO: ANISUR RAHAMAN

Take a close look at this so-called "public" bus. How can anything so blatantly unfit be allowed on the road in the first place, leave alone be permitted to carry passengers? The authorities are supposed to protect citizens but they simply do not care. Are human lives so cheap that such risks can be ignored? Vehicles like this are not uncommon either. We are appalled. Will the government take notice of such outrageous violations?

Dhaka Economy with words needed

The PM talks too much, and too critically, thereby lowering the image of the high post. It is not necessary to be so verbose. She can't prattle like an ordinary citizen. Also the PM attends too many functions, not at all essential in her position. She is being over-publicised, and it has the reverse effect (over-use of the charisma concept). When does she work?

General de Gaulle used to give one press conference a year; and the cabinet ministers were not encouraged to see him at too frequent intervals. More exposure is not a sign of popularity. The standard of criticism has to be maintained at high public level.

A Citizen

Dhaka

The end of history?

Monjuri Kabir's able commentary in The Daily Star of January 28 makes one wonder whether the end of history is in sight in Bangladesh, thanks to versions of originality displaced by the current regime.

The local and foreign historians, columnists, analysts, editorial writers have a problem: how to analyse, comment, and interpret historical events in Bangladesh, specially relating to the period 1970-75, with the sword of defamation hanging over their heads.

It is unfortunate that hurried legislation was passed in a lean House without proper and serious debate, as the implications are far reaching, and might cause misunderstanding and prove harmful to innocent persons, who might be trapped unwittingly in the wording of the law. Then there is the infamous SPA, which has not brought any bouquets for the regime.

Abul M Ahmad
Dhaka

"Notebooks flood market"

The Daily Star writes under the above headline: "Notebooks have flooded bookstalls in the city as an alternative to textbooks, still unavailable in the market, thanks to the failure of three Beximco concerns to print and distribute these in the market as per the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) schedule (page 12; Thursday, January 18, 2001).

One wonders, why The Daily Star has started to play the role of a 'step mother' towards Beximco over an issue that surely falls upon the shoulders of those working for the timely publication of textbooks at the highest level.

The Daily Star says, "notebook printers have managed to leak out contents of different textbooks in connivance with some unscrupulous NCTB employees and printed notebooks ahead of the arrival of textbooks." The notebooks ahead of the arrival of textbooks." How very funny! The notebook printers received the manuscripts, even before the textbook printers! That too with the help of the NCTB employees. This is a sweeping accusation ignoring the failure on the part of NCTB.

If there is a crisis over textbooks, which was not present previously, it is the people working in the NCTB who are responsible. The dimension of the crisis is no different than it was for the past five years, but what was that newspaper doing then when other printers were in similar position? Or did those printers who were delayed not merit similar coverage as accorded now to that issue? Should any newspaper nurture such a partisan attitude towards another?

Mujibul Haque
Sobhanbag, Dhaka