as a forum only for discussion of

bodies like World Bank, IMF etc., in

that it can be as flexible and informal

as it reacquires to be, both in format

and the selection of agenda. Being a

non-government forum the summit in Davos can embrace every shade

of opinion and seek to achieve a

consensus by moderating divergent

views. To do this the sponsor should

invite not only glamorous and well-

known personalities in politics and

economics but also people who

represent such interests as environ-



DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 9, 2001

Act of sabotage on rail-tracks

Electronic detection device needed

hese are bad times we are going through. After Brahmanbaria comes the lethal act of sabotage on a railway bridge near Feni bringing a whole train trundling down. The gut feeling is one of premonition that we might get caught up in a vortex of new trouble. But while such is the bleak side of the mood there is good reason to take heart from the fact that those untoward incidents looked avoidable on a close scrutiny.

As for the costly train derailment disaster it was the work of a conspiracy hatched amidst a strike call, so that it was apparently politically motivated. Even otherwise, saboteurs with their ulterior political agenda try to fish in troubled waters

Mazharul Islam, the alleged saboteur, has stated in police custody, that the 'others' who had removed the fishplates between the rail-tracks were non-locals, meaning thereby that he was talked into it and that outsiders were involved in it. They had no qualms about the lives of so many they were putting in danger, so terribly committed they were as hirelings.

While politicians need to get their act together and a public education campaign is essential for combating the scourge of reckless misadventures permeating a dangerous message to the fifth columnists it is the immediately doable and practicable aspects of the strategy that we would like to focus on. These may be treated as our set of recommendations drawn out in the light of the rail disaster that was just waiting to happen thanks to the absence of safeguards along railway tracks in the remote interiors of the country. It was in the darkness of night that a group of people huddled over a spot of the track and set about removing the fish-plates. But for their hammer making a din into the night those farmers would not have had any inkling of what was going on whatsoever. They had something of a barely noticeable tiny red piece of cloth held aloft to warn off the driver of the rushing locomotive but that was going to be ignored. And, before they could make it to the next railway station presumably on foot to have the train stop short of the danger-point, the disaster had taken place.

The moral of the story is that the susceptibility to such things happening, not to speak of accidents taking place, is very high in our conditions where the signalling and advance warning systems remain primitive. We need to have structured safeguards along the railway routes in order that the security status of our passengers can be brought at par with the modest regional standards.

There is fibre optic line in place along certain railway tracks where we can immediately install the electronic signalling-cum-detection system to cover for any risks and blink alert to all concerned in time for a pull-back from any lurking disaster. As for the length of railway tracks having no optic fibre astride we must get a move on to provide it with the same for the sake of an expanded electronic networking of the railway system to pre-empt accidents.

Chaos in Davos

HASNAT

ABDUL HYE

But it has become so. Over the past

few years rampaging demonstra-

tors descending (ascending?) on

this Swiss city tucked in to the

picturesque Alpine height have

become almost part of the seasonal

crowd of holiday makers in nearby

ski resorts. Angry protest made by

waves of placard carrying and

stone-throwing activists belonging

to the green and anti-capitalist

movements almost sent the last

summit into a tailspin. Beleaguered

law enforcers fought with trun-

cheons and teargas to prevent

another Seattle from happening.

This year the police was better

prepared and more than adequately

armed. Wizened by last year's

experience of street violence and

not to be caught off-guard authori-

ties banned demonstration in

advance and tightened security

measures. Rail service to Davos

was shut down for ten hours on the

opening day of the summit to keep

any last minute stragglers away.

Check posts were set up on roads

and rail stations to apprehend and

turn back suspected troublemakers.

Police on duty was even ready with

such unconventional weapons as

spraying cow manure as a last

resort against the demonstrators.

The tight and meticulous security

measures were successful in pre-

venting untoward incidents from

turning into ugly and uncontrollable.

Unlike last year, no car was vandal-

ized and no one was seriously

HAOS in Davos need not be

repetitive like the song "rain

in Spain" in "My Fair Lady"

injured. But the summit did not get total reprieve. Motley crowds of demonstrators sneaked through the cordon sanitaire and played cat and mouse with the riot police. Even if with lower intensity, the demonstrators registered protest on behalf of their causes with a good deal of symbolism. Their presence was not lost on the media which carried news of both the summit and the demonstration against it. For over a decade the annual

global summit organized by the World Economic Forum, a nongovernmental organization based in

more robust world economy on track. The bottom line of consensus in the summit was that in an era of globalization there could not and should not be any boat-rockers. Policy agenda emerging from the summit was not only meant for world leaders to be implemented in their own countries but also served to promote the interests of multinationals. Being at the vanguard of globalization the multi-national corporations have actually been the main motive force (and also source of funding) behind the Summit in Davos. International organizations

liberalization gathered pace, barriers to movement of capital were dismantled and the world became wired in a network of digital information a borderless economy was ushered where politics seemed to no longer matter. This development taken together with the victory of free market with its corollary of capitalist supremacy meant merger and acquisitions leading to huge behemoths of multinationals that wielded enormous powers and influence dwarfing those of many nation states

tried to gloss over these grim realities and potential risks or become irrationally optimistic, pent up anger and frustration spilled over onto the street. The message behind the barricade was loud and clear: if globalization meant capitalism and capitalism meant giving free rein to profit seeking multi-nationals it was not acceptable to the ordinary people who care about family values and a sustainable environment. Both of these being threatened by globalization, the ordinary people had no other alternative but to take to the streets demonstrating their

economic development and that too through the perspective of undiluted globalism. In adopting this narrow focus it played into the hands of the multinationals and came to be seen as their mouthpiece. The backlash from the anti-globalization and anticapitalist groups may have been overly dramatized but there has been little exaggeration in the feelings of anger and frustration conveyed The World Economic Forum has an important advantage over world

In fact, in the unfolding economic

It should be an occasion to discuss Development in its broader connotation. It should be an occasion to discuss development in general. If globalization is to mean a better life for everyone, in a meeting to discuss the state of the world the people of the global village should be represented adequately.

IN MY VIEW

Zurich, has attracted world leaders in politics, economics, business and technology. The past participants in the summit in Davos read like a list of "who is who" in these areas in the contemporary world. The world leaders gather to discuss the state of the world economy, to analyse the emerging tends in world trade and finance and to speculate about the future. Lately, informal diplomacy to settle international disputes has also taken place behind the scene, outside the agenda of the summit. But such sideshows have not detracted from the dominant characteristics and the offl agenda of the summit which can be embraced within the rubric "economic". Sitting on the common platform provided by the World Economic Forum world leaders tried to forge a common perspective from which the alobal economic progress or the lack of it was to be viewed by them. Taking stock of what had happened to the global economy during the past year the participants were expected to take independent but wellorchestrated actions for keeping a

like World Bank, IMF, WTO, etc. scenario nation state, politics and sharing the same ideology on globalization joined the summit in ull force adding their clout to its deliberations. From an annual gathering of world leaders the Summit in Davos has now become the joint forum of a disparate group of people and agencies but all bound together (voluntarily and not so voluntarily) by the politicoeconomic imperatives of economic globalization.

To be sure, the summit has lately added topics like wealth divide and digital divide to put a human face on its overwhelmingly traditional economic agenda. But though the agenda was slightly expanded as a salve to the conscience of the organisers and as a sop to critics there has been no paradigmatic shift and no ideological compromise reflecting a flexible stance on the framework of political and economic development. Since history ended in favour of liberal democracy and capitalism the future of globalization has to follow these two templates without any attenuation. As trade

welfare state were made to appear as obsolete ideas. Globalization superceded all these and meant the beginning of a future where people, goods and money would move freely and everyone would share from increasing level of global economic prosperity. But the present which was to lead to the future Camelot soon brought a rude awakening not only to the poor in the third world, but to many in the rich countries. It became clear that globalization has a price tag, that it meant collapse of industries, termination of business and retrenchment of both blue and white collar employees. Most importantly, it meant for millions of ordinary individuals uncertainty about the future. It also held dark portends for the future of the planet earth. The omnipotent multinationals, who would rule the roost in the globalized economy in future. held both millions of ordinary people and the environment at their whims and mercy liable to be sacrificed at the alter of their bottom line profit. While champions of globalization

protest. Long before Seattle become a water-shed in public acceptance of globalization sporadic protest from different guarters had forced some soul searching and reappraisal inside international bodies like the World Bank and various UN agencies. Demonstration on the streets of developed countries including America not only shocked the policy makers but also brought a greater sense of urgency in rethinking about globalization. A consensus emerged, slowly but inevitably, that human development couldn't be measured only in dollars and cents. at least in aggregate figures. There is no doubt now that development is what it does to the small men or small women. At the end of the day, it is what happens to an individual's life or his family's life that matters.

Where Davos Summit went awry is in excluding the bigger agenda of development and broader participation by people representing allimportant interests that are relevant in the daily life of people. It should

general.

not have been projected to be seen

ment, gender and poverty. It should no longer be dominated by economic agenda and attended by people known by their rich or their might. It should be an occasion to discuss Development in its broader connotation. It should be an occasion to discuss development in If globalization is to mean a better life for everyone, in a meeting to discuss the state of the world the people of the global village should be represented adequately With some restructuring the annual summit organized by World Economic Forum can do lot of good to the cause of globalization. For a starter, it can rename itself as World Development Forum which will be a good public relations gesture as well as indicative of substantive change in its agenda. With such changes in appearance and in commitments the annual summit organized by it need not be under siege by its critics. Davos during summit need not be afraid of chaos. In fact it may not expect any.

Never mind the last words



MOHAMMAD **BADRUL** AHSAN

OST people who knew Syed Ali Kabir, the former Bangladesh Bank who died last December, didn't know that once he was my boss. But all of those who knew him would agree with me that he was a man-child, an adult who handled the complexities of life with the simplicity of a child. I was curious to know what must have been the last thing on his ever-churning mind. And his wife tells me that about three days before he died he had asked for the constitution of Israel. Then for the next two days he uttered the word "Hebron" many times. Nobody could tell what was the link between the last days of a dying man and the name of a city in western Jordan occupied by Israel. There was a time when last words were meant to be epigrammatic, the somewhat concentrated expression of life. It was as if all of an individual's earthly time would be sharpened to a point where one or more words could proclaim the grand summation of his life. The last

word uttered by William Randolph Hearst, the publishing giant of the USA, before his death was "Rosebud". Anybody who has seen the movie "Citizen Kane" would know that it had created a great deal of controversy amongst those who knew Hearst until they realized it was a word etched on the back of a chair facing him at the time of his death

If death is dark, the last words of dying people can be gray. According to one version. Oscar Wilde ranted before his death, " Either that wallpaper goes or I do." The great Goethe of Enlightenment is said to have cried for more light as he

Damn it! There's that cuckoo again!" US General Robert E. Lee is said to have made his exit with the military-metaphysical command: Strike the tent!" William Saroyan telephoned to the Associated Press before he died in 1981: " Everybody has got to die, but I always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?"

Often last words can have the uncanny resonance of clairvoyance. Thomas A. Edison said as he a fit of mordant premonition,

me that he wasn't afraid of death. If death was inevitable, so be it and what would his death matter, if not disappearance of just another speck of dust from the surface of eternity? Hamlet signified that disappearance in his last words, "the rest is silence." Those who suffer in life often seek salvation in death, their last words sometimes ending up on suicide notes to explain that none was to blame for their death, which they had brought

The last words of Mahatma Gandhi under the impact of assassin's bullets were "Hey Ram, Hey The first Prime Minister of

Caesar expressed his wounded astonishment in his last words," Thou too Brutus!

There have been others who were funny in their last words. The Irish writer Brendan Behan croaked in 1964 after he turned to the nun who had just wiped his brow and said " Ah, bless you, Sister, may all your sons be bishops." On another nstance, the nurse of John Holmes, an uncle of US Jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., was trying to keep his feet warm. The reason, she explained to someone in the room, was, "Nobody ever died with his feet warm." John Holmes, who was

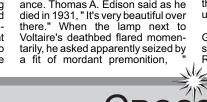
believed to be in a state of coma.

before he conks out. But most people would say things at the time of their death. which are mundane They would divyy up their property amongst the children, or give advice to them on how to face the world after their death and so forth. Some dying people would want to eat their favourite food or see their favourite persons before the grand exit. For them the last wish is what eloquently expresses their last thoughts.

If deathbed is some kind of a stage, then last words are not always how the actors strut and fret to announce the grand finale. Although the last words could at times emanate from the depth of the role, they are mostly fillers, which speak the mind of an actor caught in transit between life and death. Every child enters the world with a cry as if to proclaim his arrival. But does every man try to announce his departure with his last words?

Death erases life The last w more than anything else, are the last screeches of that erasing act. Never mind what these last words mean, because they may not mean anything but the mutters of vanishing life. T. S. Eliott wailed in Journey of Magi, " I had seen birth and death but had thought they were different: this Birth was hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death." May be, what a dying man mutters is his own astonishment at the approaching futility when the end starts licking up its own beginning. No matter what starts with a bang and ends with a whimper, or other way

around.



upon themselves. Ram!" CROSS TALK

To bring the factor of deterrence to bear on the question of averting future acts of sabotage we have to punish the culprits of Wednesday's rail disaster in an appropriate manner. Those who called the shots from behind should be identified and dealt with even more severely than perhaps the frontline operators.

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If deathbed is some kind of a stage, then last words are not always how the actors strut and fret to announce the

kicked the bucket. In 1904 Anton Chekov died with a sad thought, "It's a long time since I drank champagne." The happenstance was that his coffin rode a freight car marked FRESH OYSTERS!

Do last words somehow indicate any correlation between life and death? Perhaps at times the tongue gives away in death what the heart could not hold in life. That explains why Britain's dying Lord Chief Justice Gordon Hewart had uttered,

What? The flames already?" Death is a kind of withdrawal, when life evacuates its earthly abode and embarks on an undefined journey. Gary Gilmore, the murderer executed in Utah, USA in 1977 was cocksure when he set out for that journey with an existentialist machismo. He told the warden before the time of his execution, "Let's do it!"

Recently, a septuagenarian banker who knew Syed Ali Kabir told

Pakistan Liaqat Ali Khan is said to have cried, "God save Pakistan" as he was about to breathe his last, cut down by assassin's bullet. It is believed that British Prime Minister William Pitt had exclaimed when departing this life, "My country! How I love my country!" On the other extreme, Roman emperor Nero resented at the time of his death, "How a great artist perishes with me!" Between his love of country

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO

and private sense of betrayal, Julius

regained his consciousness for long enough to observe, "John Rogers did!" and then slipped away. For those who don't know, John Rogers was an English Protestant divine who was burned at the stake for heresy in 1555.

Believe it or not, the last words can be as varied as the people who utter them. In Hindi or Bengali movies, the last words are always decisive. An actor would usually divulge a secret or solve a riddle

THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

The democratic principle

It is the usual practice of journalists not only in Bangladesh but world over to ask provocative questions of those in positions of power, political and otherwise. In my opinion, trying to get a controversial answer or even embarrass public figures is part and parcel of journalism. In fact they may often feel like they have scored a point. The Prime Minister's recent remark about the position of the President is a case in point. The honorable Prime Minister attends so many press conferences, one would hope that by now she would have understood the ways of the Press and had more thought out and diplomatic answers well prepared in advance. Take the new U.S. President George Bush Junior. Given his widely acknowledged ineptitude and lack of knowledge on very simple matters of state, there seems to be so many answers he does not know. But his answer is always the same. "No Comment".

Let's face it, we are presently in a nearly defunct parliamentary democracy due to the opposition's boycott of Parliament. The party in power is supposed to hold the majority of seats. In spite of this, legislative functions have come to a complete standstill because usually so few legislators are present in order complete the legislative functions. But how does such a government run? To my mind, I cannot recall a weaker system of

governance since liberation. It is true that before our nascent democracy, we were subjected to dark years of military misrule. This makes it more unfortunate that we are now subjected to this misgovernance and rule of arrogance where the sanctity of the President's position is criticized. The President is after all the ultimate authority in our system of governance. His position is especially critical given our shaky parliament and weak governance.

Our previous military rulers are known for their arrogance and their ignorance. Have we come back to those traits in our new leaders? The Awami League's primary task at this time should be to restore a democratic system in this country. This is the best way to revive the memory of Bangabandhu, and would do more to his memory than the naming of bridges, stadiums and hospitals ever could.

The President is the ultimate arbitrator in our system of governance. It is crucial that we do not compromise it through arrogance.

Shahed Latif Dhaka Third force? 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.

PHOTORIAL





STAR PHOTO: A K M MOHSIN

This brick factory in Mirpur is one among more than 700 factories that throw out noxious gases into the atmosphere. Dhaka is becoming notorious as the city with one of the most polluted atmospheres in the world. Is the new generation of children ever going to breathe clean air? Will the authorities take heed?

As an educated, elderly citizen and voter, I would like to tell other voters that propaganda by the regime against fundamentalist religious groups and other political parties, accusing them of being involved in anti-state activities, should be carefully questioned. Also to be questioned is the policy to give aged Freedom Fighters pro-party colours. The Freedom Fighter fought for the country, not for a political party. Politicizing the Freedom Fighters is a huge political blunder. Bangladeshi citizens who do not support the ruling party cannot be enemies of the country. They are not indulging in anti-state activities. To claim otherwise is illogical. This type of propaganda will not earn the party any additional votes, but take away many old supporters. Clutching at straws is not politics, but a struggle for self-survival. AL has to learn how to handle criticism. The country goes not belong to it. The latest bomb blast at Paltan Maidan during the CPB meeting is a

activities. Until recently, business houses took pride in having offices here. But this has become a most neglected area

THE EDITOR

Footpaths are in terrible condition. Two open spaces have dumping grounds for rubbish. One has become the Terminal for the Narayangonj-bound Premier Bus. The round-about in front of Janata Bank is in a very sorry state - the drain around it is choked with rubbish causing water to stand whenever there is slightest rain. Flower beds exist, but they are unattended. After dusk Motijheel is badly lit.

Those of us who have seen this place for two decades, remember how well lit it used to be. It is because of this poor light that muggings take place here. Motijheel is dirty, littered with polyethene bags. Surface drains, which were made deep after the 1988 floods, are now so choked up that it is hard to be sure they exist at all! Traffic is terrible, with rickshaws everywhere and no police in sight.

pointer that a third force might be emerging, due to the failures of the two major political parties. ability that it deserves

Frustrated Voter

Neglected Motijheel Motijheel is the hub of economic

Dhaka

The amount of revenue that the government and municipal corporation earn is quite substantial, so why is this place forsaken and uncared for? Will the authorities look into this, and return to Motijheel the respect-

C. M. Dahr