

No more empty words

Put them behind bar

ON the fringes, AL MP Iqbal has been refused audience before the PM and the officer-in-charge of Ramna police station has been laid off. But on the core question of arresting the shooters photographed in connection with the Malibagh incident on Tuesday no headway has been made. More than two full days have elapsed since the Prime Minister ordered those identified killers hauled up from wherever they might be, before a fully attended central committee meeting of her party on Wednesday. She even warned action against those of her partymen who 'sheltered' goons. But her words are still drawing a blank leaving us wondering if these will go the way of her previous directives which went unceremoniously unheeded. Earlier on, someone in a procession led by MP Alhaj Moqbul Hossain in February, 1999 had killed Sajal Chowdhury, and Jewel, the son of MP Kamal Majumder who had been accused in the Shipu murder case remains at large even to this day. And, now we have reports that the Uttara police themselves have formally accused "some influential persons" of compelling the complainant in Taraj Uddin murder case to drop the name of Dipu Chowdhury, son of State Minister Mofazzal Hossain Maya, from the FIR.

We are not interested in the making over of cases from this wing of the police to that nor the fanfare of 'intensified searches' being played out to the gallery. All we want is result, pure and simple.

For her part, the Prime Minister has not tired of reaffirming her directives to the police at various forums, including the discussion she has lately had with resident foreign dignitaries. But some ambiguity apparently crept into the signal she sent to the law enforcers when she questioned, like some of her own party colleagues, as to why there were no photographs depicting the 'other side of the picture.'

We urge the PM to stay focused on her latest directive to have the police haul up those caught in Tuesday's Malibagh act and then she flushes out all other terrorists going scot free for being the son or relative of a minister or MP or otherwise taken under the wings of party patronisation. Failure in this will mean a credibility slide she can ill-afford.

Footbridges by DCC

Long-term planning needed

PEDESTRIANS trying to cross any one of Dhaka's busy streets lay themselves open to unimaginable risks. Traffic in the city is not only high in volume, but also consists of vehicles that move at a varying and unpredictable speed. In these circumstances, the best and safest option would be to use a footbridge.

The Dhaka City Corporation built 19 footbridges four years ago, at a cost of Taka 50 lakh each, but these missed many of the busiest locations. People trying to cross at these points take the risk of being hit by cars, buses, auto-rickshaws or rickshaws. To inflict this trauma on senior citizens, women and children, is simply inhuman.

That the DCC could fail to select some of the most obvious locations, such as Maghbazaar, Bangla Motor, or the Science Laboratory, as well as many others, indicates a serious lack of foresight on its part.

To make matters worse, the DCC has now undertaken the re-location of several existing footbridges, again at a considerable cost, because the volume of traffic has fallen in these locations. Traffic patterns may change over time, particularly in an expanding metropolis, but it is to be wondered whether DCC based its decisions on thorough feasibility plans in the first place.

The DCC intends to spend Taka 2.5 crore on five new footbridges in the city this year. It is a much overdue decision and welcomed by us, but we would like to stress that, this time plans must be properly vetted before being implemented. Funds must not be squandered because of miscalculations or lack of foresight. Dhaka has been growing and will continue to expand. The DCC must work within a master plan that takes a long-term perspective, and provides safe alternatives for pedestrians on a permanent basis.

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Party politics and the nation's future



DR. A. R. CHOUDHURY

THIS has not been a good week for the Awami League. Awami League has no one but itself to blame for its current position. Let's take the killings of four people in Dhaka during the hartal hours. It is now clear that the shots were fired from the procession led by Dr. Iqbal. Despite what Zillur Rahman has to say, photographs never lie. Awami League could have diffused the situation by taking responsibility for the incidence and initiating actions against the culprits. Their inaction gave a rare opportunity to the opposition camp to utilise the situation.

So what did the BNP do? They responded by calling for more hartals. Now, the question is, can the BNP absolve itself of the responsibility of running havoc with people's life? What good does it do by calling hartal day after day? They claim that hartal and the related movement will eventually bring the government down. The Awami League government is set to resign in the next few months. Is bringing down an elected government three months before their scheduled resignation worth the price that they are forcing the nation to pay?

On the eve of the Ekushey February, I would like the readers to step back and take stock of our current political situation. What you will find is anything but pleasant.

The recent bickering among the major political parties in Bangladesh raises a pertinent question: does our political leadership have the commitment necessary to lead the country out of the vicious cycle of poverty, inequality, and instability? Will they be able to rise above narrow party and self-interests and take decisions in the greater interest of the nation?

If, after observing the events of the last few months, someone raises doubts, can he or she be blamed? Our political leaders are

simply not behaving in a responsible manner.

In a parliamentary democracy, strong disagreements between the ruling and opposition parties on policy issues are normal. In fact, it's a healthy sign. However, when political parties start taking this disagreement to a new low level of mud-slinging and violence, they simply trivialise the norms of democracy. What we observe in Bangladesh is just that. Neither the opposition nor the ruling party can absolve themselves from excesses that have occurred. Excesses have occurred on both sides. Rules have been violated, treaties have been broken, democratic traditions have been thrown out the window! In many cases, our political parties oppose each other just for the sake of opposition. In parliamentary democracies, it is common to find opposition parties supporting certain measures proposed in the parliament by the government. Similarly, government parties can also be found favouring issues raised by the opposition parties. To my memory, there has hardly been any instance where our major political parties have agreed on a matter of substance. It only shows the lack of sincerity on the part of our ego-driven politicians. It is time that our political parties put a stop to this dangerous exercise of undermining democratic values and commit themselves in doing what they have been elected to do. In this regard, I would like to go back to the Prime Minister's announcement last year that had opened up a rare opportunity to bring back civility to our political process.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina proposed an issue on which there should apparently be no disagreement among the political parties. She had unilaterally renounced the use of hartal as a political tool. If she is true to her words, Awami League will not call a hartal even after leaving the government. It was, indeed,

CONNECTING THE DOTS

A backlash against hartal has already started around the country. The silent majority is finally standing up and saying: enough is enough! Let's bring sanity back to our political process. The earlier the political leaders can feel the pulse of the nation, the better it would be for all of us. For their part, the ruling party must recognise and respect the democratic rights of the opposition to express their views, both inside and outside the parliament.

a bold step on her part. She had undoubtedly opened the door for similar assurances from the opposition parties.

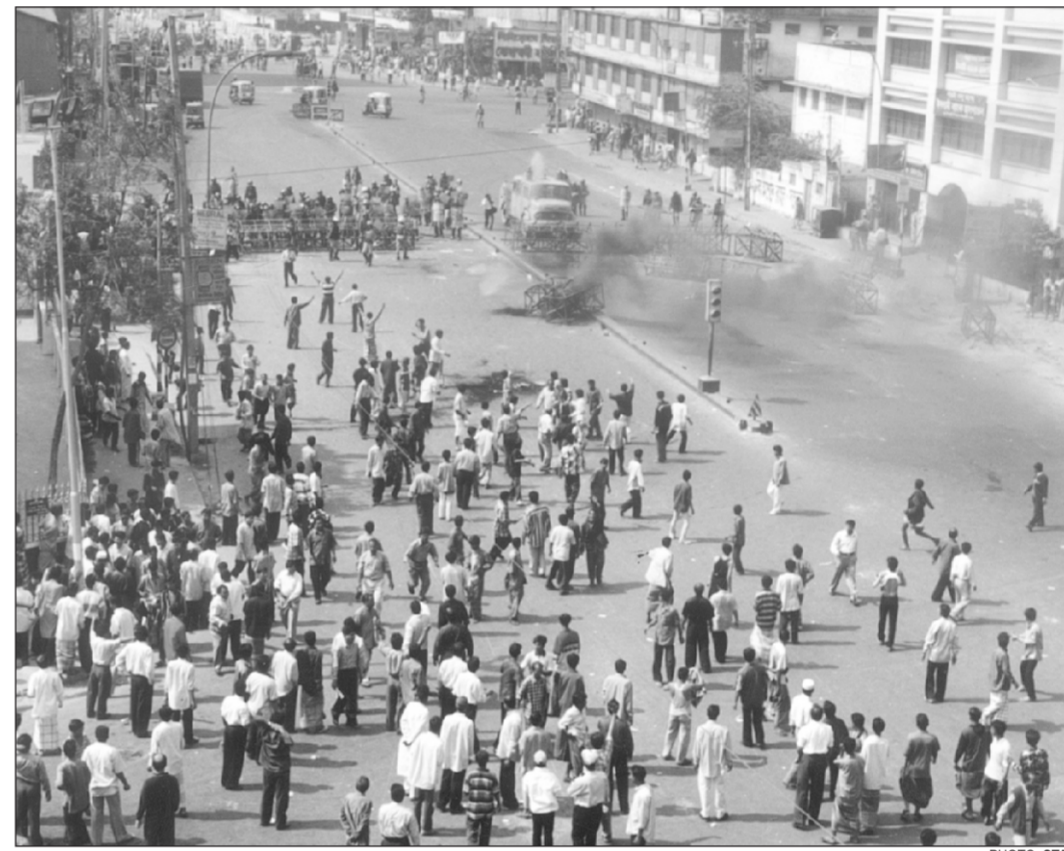
All eyes were on Begum Zia and the BNP. Are they going to respond positively 'to the olive branch' extended by the present government, or are they going to continue to resort to means that are detrimental to national interest? Well, evidence from the last few months clearly indicate their unwillingness to restrain from using hartal as a political weapon.

Hartal can no longer be used for making political statements. It doesn't measure the extent of public

support for those who call for it's observance. Survey results published last year by the Bangladesh Human Rights Commission showed that nine out of ten respondents opposed the use of hartal for realising political demands. After every hartal, the organisers congratulate the people for making it a success. The fact is, hartal is observed not from conviction but from fear. Who would dare to go on with their daily chores and, in the process, risk life and property? Politicians who do not accept this fact are either naive or unwilling to face reality.

It is common knowledge that a personal dislike towards each other

has driven our two leaders. This has, in many instances, influenced their political decisions. Politicians like to make pious speeches about magnanimity, but the urge to settle old scores is one of the most constant themes in the history of war and politics. The question is, can our leaders, for once, rise above personal animosity and do what is right for the nation? In Bangladesh, we now need someone with these convictions. Someone who would be willing to sit and talk to adversaries in order to move the country in the right direction. Someone who would be willing to set aside narrow party interests and put forward the



Can Bangladesh afford the cost of hartals?

Zeaul Huq Tulu, a friend, a philosopher and a guide to us all

M M REZAUL KARIM

ZEALU Huq Tulu is no more. One can hardly reconcile with the thought. The ever-smiling, the ever-helpful, the ever-popular and the ever-present person on the Dhaka scene will never appear again in person. Tulu breathed his last in a Singapore hospital in the night of February 15. A pall of gloom fell on his large family and on the wide spectrum of friends. To many, the news transcended natural sadness into a state of vacuum that a person rarely experiences in life. Three weeks ago when he left for Singapore for treatment of an ailment which his doctors in Dhaka could not diagnose, little did we realise it was the last time we would see him alive. Yet, the prolonged suffering following his kidney transplant almost two years ago and the subsequent complications



raised many a doubt in the minds of many whether he would succeed in weathering storm this time. He did not. The almighty ordained it that way and the mortals must accept. It is difficult to recount the many virtuous qualities that Tulu was endowed with. The charming traits of his character would naturally evoke praise, unnaturally create

jealousy and universally promote a sense of camaraderie and fellow feeling for both his friends and, if there be any, his foes alike. He was a pivot around whom people revolved. I have seen him to be courted by people of all walks of life politicians (of all affiliations), diplomats, journalists, litterateurs, artists you name any. He befriended them easily, even if the did not see eye to eye with them on many issues. People valued his counsel and benefited from it. His home was a

focal point of the society, an ideal seat for rendezvous and a virtual salon of the eighteenth century France. New Years' parties at his home were much sought after and became almost legendary. But, he could not accomplish all those without close and tireless support of his most hospitable and gracious wife, Jolly. With her he shared much of his credit.

A valiant freedom fighter, his was a chronicle of success a distinguished entrepreneur and trader, he

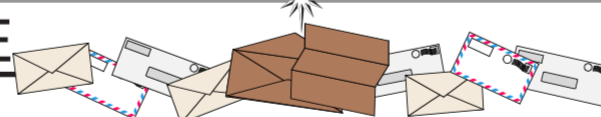
made his mark and won both praise and respect also in the business circle. But politics appeared to flow in his blood. His face would immediately brighten up when someone commenced a political discussion. He would not merely participate vigorously in these discussions, but would tend to dominate them both in jest and with fervour. Politicians at loggerheads with each other would often be persuaded to subscribe to his logic, but in private, for obvious reasons. He could never be a king,

but gained reputation of almost being a king-maker.

The last but not the least point of his character that impressed one the most was his being a family man. What a loveable father, husband and brother Tulu was! The deep and everlasting affection for his family was most warmly reciprocated by its members. All his three daughters, Tuli, Lopita and Oupy, simply doted on him. With the sudden demise of his two brothers in quick succession, his added responsibility was carried out in all earnest with promptness and zeal.

Today, while we mourn his death and pray to the Almighty for his soul to rest in peace in heaven, we know for sure that a person like Zeaul Huq Tulu will live forever in the hearts of his numerous friends, relatives and well-wishers.

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



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.

Going round the bend



STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Incongruities like this one-horse power carriage trying to run faster than a truck illustrate Dhaka's mind-boggling traffic. The solution is not to build more road dividers, but to limit and restrict slower traffic, particularly during peak hours. We need a comprehensive traffic plan with one-way systems and phasing out of slower vehicles, as well as public awareness campaigns. Will the authorities act?

Tributes to Tawfiq Aziz Khan

The news of Tawfiq Bhai's demise is indeed sad. He was one of the pioneers of sports journalism in this country. A gentleman to the hilt, he specialised in international tennis coverage. Very few reporters in our country could cover tennis with all its technicalities as he could. That is one contribution that many will not notice. His hard-work behind Krira Jagat in its nascent stage (with the late Rashid Bhai) is known by everybody. Besides he ran the administration of *Dainik Bangla* and *The Daily Star* impeccably. May Allah give him peace.

Akhtar Dhaka

For many years we knew Tawfiq Aziz Khan simply as 'Tawfiq Aziz', the cricket commentator and an objective critic of sports. We always enjoyed his sports writings which used to be beautiful pieces of literature enriched by lucidity and artistry. The glowing tribute paid to him in the editorial and the Star tribute (DS February 13, 2001) are a rarity in the print media of this land. Not many have received such glowing tributes. He deserved them in no ambiguous terms.

We may not be able to share the pain being suffered by his family and the loss felt by the DS family but we express our empathy with his bereaved family and his colleagues at *The Daily Star*. We pray to Almighty Allah to grant peace to the departed soul and strength to those

near and dear he left behind to mourn his death.

I would like to quote from Oliver Goldsmith: "Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere; Heaven did a recompense as largely send: He goes to Mis'ry all he had, a tear, He gain'd from Heaven ('t was all he wish'd) a friend."

Syed Waliullah Dhaka

MP's act

To say I am appalled, aghast and alarmed, would be putting things mildly. The picture of a Member of Parliament in the company of men pointing guns is not acceptable, even as an idea (*The Daily Star*, February 14). Especially if he is by profession a physician who is trained to save lives. Or has he forgotten?

J D Silva Dhaka University

PSA or PSAL?

We are aghast at the attack on the opposition march by the Awami League's 'peaceprocession' carrying lethal weapons. We have read that 18 persons, including BNP leader Mirza Abbas, have been sued under PSA but we have heard nothing about what steps are being taken against Awami League MP Dr. HBM Iqbal and his cadres who started the firing. We are perplexed about the PSA, is it Public Safety Act or Perfect Safety for Awami League?

An Appalled Citizen

Stop the violence

The images (*The Daily Star*, February 14) were horrific. In broad daylight, people were carrying weapons and shooting at a political procession. In one picture, a young man has his pistol pointing up, surrounded by police, who are not paying any attention to him! If news reports are to be believed, the gunmen in the picture were part of a counter march organized by a Member of the Parliament, who, it seems, holds a doctorate degree, no less!

I scan the newspaper every day and I cannot remember the last time that it did not carry reports of shooting, killing, kidnapping, and often, reports of senseless deaths of innocent bystanders. I am convinced that Bangladesh is in the middle of a 30-year ongoing civil war, a continuation of the liberation struggle against Pakistan. After the Pakistanis were driven away, the war has turned inwards. In pre-Bangladesh, politics leaders such as Hamid Khan Bhashani, Moni Singh, Tajuddin Ahmed, imparted dignity to political work. And there were scores of political workers, intellectuals who operated in the same vein.

This phase of brutality began after liberation. Leaders of all the major political parties, and their "student fronts" are responsible. Everyone on the street knows this. Decent people in the country need to stand up to the thugs that

operate in the garb of political leaders and political workers. Each of them should be held personally responsible, until such time as they unequivocally denounce violence in politics and purge from their individual parties, publicly, the perpetrators.

I do not suggest summary judgement: this is not a fascist society. The overwhelming need is to preserve democracy and the rule of law. Politicians can help eliminate the miscreants by allowing the law enforcement people to do their job. This requires providing them with needed resources and removing the system of political pressure, threat of bodily harm or loss of income and advancement in their professions.

It is high time that sensible people of all political persuasions started taking steps to end this nightmare. That would be a tremendous tribute to those whom the country remembers on February 21st.

M. Siddique, Washington DC, USA

Home Minister

I was shocked to hear the tough talking Home Minister putting the blame on the

opposition for the killing at Rajarbagh and comparing it to killings by Pakistani forces in 1971. This is poppycock.

M. Ahmad, Uttara-Dhaka.