

'Imprisonment' again

Can we have some freedom at night, at least?

WE have repeatedly and vehemently protested the calling of hartals. We do so equally strongly again today, as yet another nightmare shutdown begins. This time, we are faced with a 72-hour hartal, the second non-stop hartal in two weeks. Both our political parties have, in their time, adopted hartal tactics supposedly against the party in power. The Awami League did it five years ago, and the BNP is simply repeating the experience. But each time, the real casualties of this perverted war of attrition have been the people.

We have said this before and we do so again. We say to the opposition that what they are doing is not hurting the ruling party or the administration. Instead, they are literally punishing the people.

The cases of hardship are so widespread that they defy being quantified. How can one measure the pain suffered by the weak and vulnerable, the young and the elderly, who are deprived of access to clinics, medicine and familial support? Or the suffering of countless patients in dire need of medical attention? The distress to the average household, unable to shop for its daily provisions, is huge. Students' schedules are disrupted, office goers are trapped indoors, thousands are forced to risk violence on the streets and from the owner of a small store, to the self-employed daily wage earner, a vast community is forced to forsake earnings on which entire households are dependent. Business and industry, particularly those that are export-oriented, are badly and sometimes irrevocably damaged.

The sheer inhumanity of the impact of these hartals forces us to ask the opposition why it has chosen to impose the shutdown even during the night? If the objective of the hartal is to hurt the government, as the opposition claims, how does the government suffer when the stoppage is carried through after dark? The non-stop hartal does not hurt the government in the least, but instead intensifies and increases the suffering of the people.

We are not in any manner or form ever going to condone the hartal. But we do urge the opposition to lift it during the night. This would not excuse their action but it would provide some minor alleviation to the needy and the desperate cases of human distress. For humanitarian reasons, the opposition must pay heed to this call. If it is sincere when it says that the hartal is to hurt the ruling party and not the people, let it act now and lift the shutdown at least at night, in order to marginally reduce people's distress.

A city powerless again

Maintenance remains Achilles' heel

SATURDAY'S tripping of a transformer at the Tongi sub-station and resultant partial failure of the national grid reminds us once again what a miserable power sector we have. We wonder when the government and the power authorities would realise that and act accordingly. So many times, through reports and editorial comments, this paper has tried to attract their attention to a crucial aspect of power management, namely maintenance, apparently to no avail. Amidst all this talk of more power generation to meet increasing demand, maintenance of generation, transmission and distribution systems have always taken the back seat. While successive governments have gone on from launching one power plant to the other, the power network has progressively deteriorated for want of proper maintenance. A transformer trips here or a power line snaps points at sustained negligence on the maintenance front for years on end. On the ground, however, nothing substantial has so far taken place to improve the scenario.

Let us remind the government and the power authorities once again that expansion of transmission and distribution network and enhancement of generation capability do not make an efficient power system. Unless there is round-the-clock maintenance, no matter how efficient the system is it would falter at one time or the other. It is because of gross maintenance failure, induced by negligence, the country's overall power scenario remains as miserable as ever, despite increased numbers of generation plants. What sort of power management is this where misery at the users' end exponentially increase, in spite of enhanced generation, transmission and generation mechanism? We are not sure whether the power people or the people in power have any answer to this question.

The return of cold war!



BRIG (RTD) M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE team that accompanied President George W Bush when he arrived the White House last January was largely drawn from the phalanx of the cold war period to function in a post cold war world. It is not known how much would it be able to generate the spirit of a new world but it has apparently all the potentials to bring back the spectre of cold war. The recent expulsion of diplomats by Washington and a riposte from Moscow are not only reminiscent of cold war days they are also indicative of a renewed cold war syndrome. The cold war's real syndrome, however, surrounds the issue of Bush Administration's upcoming star war programme.

Mr Bush's categorical statement that the Missile Defence system will be vigorously pursued irrespective of the opposition even from the allies bears all the signs of an authoritarian trend the new administration is set to introduce in international relationship. What the Secretary of State Colin Powell told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is

equally ominous and a veiled threat to undo the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, considered the basis of all disarmament programmes. He said that the ABM treaty in its "current form" is no longer relevant to "our new strategic framework" and that it was important for the new administration to look at the "missile defence within the context of the entire strategic framework". The determination expressed both by the president and his secretary of state to go ahead with the \$60b National Missile Defence (NMD) is

for concern". In recent times Russia has made it clear that the NMD does not constitute a threat to its nuclear shield but its implementation would sound the death knell for ABM treaty, trigger a new and potentially deadly arms race and could signal the beginning of a new cold war. Moscow has warned Washington that if the latter repudiates the ABM treaty, Russia and China would even go for the joint production of weapons capable of effectively evading the ABM shield of the United States.

China is particularly upset about the Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system the United States has proposed for Asia-Pacific countries like Taiwan and Japan. China considers it an extension of the NMD the introduction of which will have an extremely adverse impact on the region. The experts believe that TMD system in Taiwan will undermine the potential of China's strategic offensive. The sale of Aegis air defence to Taiwan by the United States is already under consideration. It is another indication that the Bush Administration is all set to introduce the TMD in Taiwan. The US-Japan defence treaty revised in 1998 is another source of anxiety in the region. Because the revised treaty allows Japan to assume enhanced role in regional security. It also encourages Japan to deploy forces in "surrounding areas".

Besides, many of the Washington's close allies have voiced their concern about the NMD. The close ally like Canada and South Korea have openly aired misgivings about the NMD tracing its origin in 1994 "Contract with America manifesto" put forward by Newt Gingrich, the arch conservative Republican speaker of the US Congress. Canada signed a joint statement with Russia in December last confirming its "commitment to strengthening strategic stability and international security." The joint statement also

fits. The NMD diplomacy may put these positive developments in jeopardy. Already the South Korean foreign office backtracked a little under pressure from Washington and issued statement saying that endorsing ABM treaty did not mean that South Korea was opposed to the United States' missile defence plan.

European leaders like Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany and President Jacques Chirac of France have characterised the NMD as an "invitation to proliferation". The German government is rather emphatic that international treaties like the ABM should continue to remain the foundation for international security. The dissent is no less palpable in the US itself, while the most articulate proponents of the NMD system see the system primarily as a means to strengthen further the offensive capabilities of the US, the other experts of the country have warned that if the administration goes ahead with the NMD and withdraws from the ABM treaty, it would leave Moscow with no alternative other than treating all other arms agreements with Washington null and void.

PERSPECTIVES

The US space command in its "Vision for 2020" report said that the outer space was the ideal platform for projecting US military dominance across "the full spectrum of conflict". But by taking the conflict in the space in its most devastating form will anything be left of peace in this planet even for the Americans to savour?

however going to offset the strategic equilibrium that has been in place since ABM treaty was signed in 1972.

The countries most upset by Bush Administration's decision to go full steam with the NMD programme are obviously Russia and China whose governments genuinely feel that the programme is primarily aimed at them. Former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev has said that the mounting tension between the United States and Russia over the possible scrapping of ABM treaty is a matter of grave concern. Although he maintained that it was "too soon" to speak of a return to cold war, he however warned that the first steps taken by the new US president "give ground

Talks were already held between the chairman of central Military Council of China Zhang Wannian and Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev in mid-February, 2001 with regards to priority project that the two countries should cooperate on if the Bush Administration went ahead with the NMD programme.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin despised the NMD concept as a whole. According to him, it could harm the world peace, development and security. In his calculation, it will sabotage global strategic balance and stability and will adversely affect international arms control and disarmament. China's chief arms control official said that the ABM treaty stood as a legal 'barrier'

underlined the importance of ABM treaty describing it as a cornerstone of strategic stability and an important foundation for international effort on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea who has been pursuing his "sunshine" policy towards North Korea feared that his policy will be a casualty of Bush Administration's NMD plans. During a visit to South Korea at the end of February last President Putin issued a joint statement with President Kim stressing the need to preserve the ABM treaty. At the same time Putin has also been making headway in convincing North Korean leadership to give up its missile in return for other bene-

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Business is as business does



ALMAS ZAKUIDDIN

MY cousin wants a job. Considering the fact that he owns one of the largest export-oriented manufacturing firms in this country, one hesitates to take him seriously. But, if it is true that big people have equally big problems, my cousin has a problem.

"Don't think this hartal is a joke," he warns.

I am the last person in the world to take any hartal, especially one that is threatening to extend till virtually the weekend, with the slightest degree of levity. But something inside me is still not convinced.

"I'm dead serious," he continues. "I asked a big firm for a job but they refused. They said I was too expensive," he explains, with a mirthless laugh.

Business details are somewhat incomprehensible to one such as I, a working gal all my life, but the salient points of this businessman's crisis are obvious. Export orders are being crippled, cash flow is under duress, the entire future of his healthy enterprise, built after much hard work and dedication, is being threatened. And three important foreign visitors have cancelled their business trip to Dhaka this week.

"They've just said they are not

coming," my cousin exclaims. Why should they? Why should they come and why should they even try to come if the climate is not welcoming to their primary interests? After all, business is as business does.

If that sounds a trifle too harsh, it is not because I do not understand. A great part of me is upset. But the litany of woes recited by my cousin does not, I must confess, translate into anything even halfway as disconcerting as my most immediate

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IF YOU ASK ME

Business is, as business does. If that really is the case, why are these big business people beating their chests? I mean, what else are they doing? By all means, go ahead and flay your arms any which way and as energetically as possible... But what else are they doing to end this pathetic political impasse?

hartal challenge which is how to commute to and from work. Perhaps I have shared this with you before, but I detest auto-rickshaws only slightly less than I hate married men who hit on single women. Both are undeniably facts of life, but both are also exceedingly unpalatable.

Forget the gallons of carbon monoxide that scooters emit, the last time I went home during a hartal, at dusk, the wretched driver kept falling asleep and veering into the road divider. I tried shouting at him and once even contemplated swinging my handbag into the back of his neck. But he seemed totally oblivious to my palpitations.

Please don't laugh at my question, but I really would like to know. Are these drivers high on drugs, perhaps? Am I being hysterical? Or, as one hardened hartal veteran said to me somewhat contemptuously last week, am I just unused to hartals?

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

"Criminal silence for three years"

I am astonished to read the news item "Criminal silence for three years" (April 5), describing how the news of arsenic contamination in Chapainawabganj municipality was concealed for the last three years.

In 1998, experts detected more than 0.2 mg/L arsenic in water samples taken from deep tube-well in Chapainawabganj. Detection of such a high level of arsenic in water of the municipality pipelines, for the first time in the country, was kept confidential till early this year. We cannot believe such an inhuman act was done by the government when the people pay taxes to government exchequer for service and social amenities. This silence is a gross violation of human rights. We hope the government will now act promptly and take necessary steps to mitigate arsenic contamination in that area.

S.M. Enayetur Raheem
Dhaka

"Pakistan: boomeranged by its Islamic politics"

In his article "Pakistan: boomeranged by its Islamic politics", (April 2) Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz has presented a vivid and objective analysis of Pakistan's political tale of woes.

He rightly emphasised that the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, very much wanted to make the newly-born country, a modern secular democracy.

But Jinnah's ideals and vision have been distorted, subverted and now remain buried by depraved politicians, self-serving bureaucrats and military dictators.

Jinnah's successors have thumbed their noses at his exhortations. They have disenfranchised and persecuted the minorities and curtailed the ordinary liberties of their citizenry. Alternating between democracy and military rule, various governments either by naked or subtle means embarked on a policy of national oppression which led to the country's dismemberment. The downward trend continues and the unending chain of crises has mauled the people. The mismanagement of the state by a string of leaders have proved their incapability, inadequacy or even their worthlessness.

Robert Kader
Chittagong

right side of hartal

There are a good number of reasons to like hartal. Hartal means waking up late in the morning. It means going late to office and coming home early. In the office there is less work and more gossip than usual. On hartal days, children find their parents at home. One can spend more time with family members. On hartal days, there is less pollution. There is no blaring of electronic horns. There is less noise and less chaos on the streets. Hartal days means more socialisation as well. As a whole, I look forward to hartal and would like to thank the Opposition Parties for calling a 72-hour hartal. Hartal really does bring a change in our monotonous life.

Noman Ali
Elephant Road, Dhaka

PHOTORIAL

Stinking surroundings

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.



Garbage is dispersed on the road in front of Willis Little Flower School at Kakrail giving the entire area a stinking and filthy look. This sends out a stench and pollutes the entire area. But the authorities are absolutely indifferent to the deplorable state of the dustbins and the surroundings. When will DCC learn to discharge their responsibility to keep the city clean?

Bangladesh sliding into the gutter

As the political unrest increases, Bangladesh slowly slides into the gutter. Instead of looking after peoples' welfare, all the politicians are interested in expressing hatred for each other. Since the independence of the country, all people have witnessed are the politicians' bitter stance against each other, use of filthy words both inside and outside the Parliament, self-aggrandisement and so on.

It will not be out of place to note that after World War I a devastated Germany not only rebuilt its economy but also reached a stage from which this nation could assist less developed regions. But what have we done? All we have been engaged in are actions destroying the country. In the process of destroying the nation are we disproving the proverb, "man is the only animal that blushes with shame"? With our shamelessness, in all these years, we are producing leaders emulating inferior characters. Will this frustrating state ever change?

Syed Waliullah
Dhaka

Enough is enough

The current political unrest fomented by the Ruling Party and the Opposition parties violates all norms of human dignity. The violence abetted by the two major political parties never has been and is still not in the interest of the people and the country.

The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have no qualification to govern the country. Prior to their current positions, they were

only housewives. I am not trying to belittle housewives toiling day and night for their families. But, let's face the fact, governing a country is much more complicated. Bangladesh is a developing country and most of the people here live from hand to mouth. They rightfully look to the government for security, economic and political stability, and a sense of national identity. Bangladesh has complex problems, which have not been and still are not addressed by the government.

Mojjama Hossein
Dhaka

The humiliation of Hippocratic oath

Doctors provide medi-care to patients and it is the prime duty of a good physician. A smiling face and good behaviour of a doctor provide a positive impact on the patient's mind. Therefore, a patient generally expects friendly behaviour from doctor. Unfortunately, most patients and their attendants have had bitter experiences from our doctors. It is true that some of our physicians are at their best with patients but they are very small in number.

On the contrary, those who once have experienced the service of a foreign doctor, can well understand the stark difference between native doctors and doctors abroad. The misbehaviour of native doctors and their lack of commitment shows nothing but utter disregard for this noble profession. Have these doctors forgotten their 'Hippocratic oath'?

ASM Sohrab Hossain
Kathal Bagan, Dhaka