LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY APRIL 9, 2001

## 'Imprisonment' again Can we have some freedom at

night, at least?

TE 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

ATURDAY'S tripping of a transformer at the Tongi substation 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-theclock 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.

was done by the government when the people. The mismanagement of

the people pay taxes to government the state by a string of leaders have

Robert Kader

Chittagong

But Jinnah's ideals and vision

have been distorted, subverted and

now remain buried by depraved

politicians, self-serving bureaucrats

thumbed their noses at his exhorta-

tions. They have disenfranchised

and persecuted the minorities and

curtailed the ordinary liberties of

their citizenry. Alternating between

democracy and military rule, vari-

ous 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

proved their incapability, inade-

quacy or even their worthlessness.

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.

Elephant Road, Dhaka

Noman Ali

Jinnah's successors have

and military dictators.

"Criminal silence for

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

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

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

boomeranged by its

In his article "Pakistan:

boomeranged by its Islamic poli-

tics", (April 2) Brig (Rtd) M Abdul

Hafiz has presented a vivid and

objective analysis of Pakistan's

He rightly emphasised that the

founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali

Jinnah, very much wanted to make

the newly-born country, a modern

Islamic politics"

political tale of woes.

secular democracy.

in that area.

"Pakistan:

Dhaka

S.M. Enayetur Raheem

In 1998, experts detected more

concealed for the last three years.

three years"

# The return of cold war!



BRIG (RTD) M ABDUL HAFIZ

HE team that accompanied President Goerge W Bash 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 administration to look at the "mis-

for concern"

In recent times Russia has made (ABM) treaty, considered the basis it clear that the NMD does not conof all disarmament programmes. He stitute a threat to its nuclear shield said that the ABM treaty in its "Cur- but its implementation would rent form" is no longer relevant to sound the death knell for ABM "our new strategic framework" and treaty, trigger a new and potentially that it was important for the new deadly arms race and could signal the beginning of a new cold war. sile defence within the context of the Moscow has warned Washington entire strategic framework". The that if the latter repudiates the ABM determination expressed both by treaty, Russia and China would even the president and his secretary of go for the joint production of weapstate to go ahead with the \$60b ons capable of effectively evading National Missile Defence (NMD) is the ABM shield of the United States; posed for Asia-Pacific countries like

against threats to undermine strategic balance and stability. According to him the ABM treaty ensured that a strategic balance could exist between small nuclear weapon states and nuclear superpower so long as the former posses a secondstrike capability. If the treaty is tampered with the way the United States wants it will lose all its signifi-

China is particularly upset about the Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system the United States has pro-

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.

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? Once that happens the nerve wreaking cold war will rush back in its ugliest shape to engulf everyone in its sweep.

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however going to offset the strategic Talks were already held between the

genuinely feel that the programme with the NMD 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

equilibrium that has been in place chairman of central Military Council since ABM treaty was signed in 1972. of China Zhang Wannian and Rus-The countries most upset by sian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev Bush Administration's decision to in mid-February, 2001 with regards go full steam with the NMD to priority project that the two programme are obviously Russia countries should cooperate on if the and China whose governments Bush Administration went ahead

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'

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".

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-

# Business is as business does



ALMAS ZAKIUDDIN

IT Y cousin wants a job. Considering the fact that L V L 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 exclaims, 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

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

coming," my cousin exclaims. Why

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

The streets of Dhaka are bizarre, even at the best of times. Potholes, cripples, lopsided vehicles, fumes, noise, snarling drivers and shellshocked commuters combine to

make a newcomer wonder if the dark side of the moon has dropped into the lap of Bangladesh.

It becomes different, but no less daunting when the traffic stops. During a day-night hartal, the eerie darkness is punctuated by scooters and gutsy cars making furtive sorties

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. My cousin and any others in a similar plight are more than welcome to stand up on the nearest dais and vent their spleen till the cows come home. (Forgive the mixed metaphors; troubled times call for troubled

The men and women who have brought an unprecedented respect for the term 'Business' in Bangla-

as those who are directly involved.

desh and particularly those who have worked their unmentionables off to make the export industry stand on its own feet, these are the people who will suffer tangibly. They know the score. They have access to the top. They are leaders, too, in their own way and (with some exceptions) in their own right.

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 that evoke memories of the curfewcommute to and from work. Perhaps ridden days of 1971 with the awe-I have shared this with you before, some difference that then, people but I detest auto-rickshaws only were fighting for a cause that they slightly less than I hate married men could all understand. 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 har-

Now, as everyone knows, nobody has a clue.

"That's my point," my cousin exclaims. I have missed it. He has undoubtedly made several points, probably about the differences between the hartal of 2001, as opposed to the hartal of 1996, (was there, is there a real difference, I would like to ask him?) but I have not been listening. Like most people, I, too, am worried about my own petty problems.

It is tempting to believe that one's personal predicament is worse than that faced by anyone else, certainly someone as obviously affluent as a big businessman. But that is not the only reason why I am reluctant to embrace the business community's cause.

end this pathetic political impasse? I am dead serious. There is no denying the very and serious danger to the business community. The extent to which the hartal crunch will pinch owners must be in direct proportion to the size of their pockets. The bigger the business, the more one has to lose. Sacrifices will have to be made. No more jaunts in Singapore or New York at the drop of a hat. No more diamonds for their mistresses. No more brand new

Safari Troopers each time the season

But what else are they doing to

Granted, these losses will trickle down as they inevitably do, to the people in general and the economy as a whole. Everyone is going to face the impact of the economic losses the country is incurring right now. But human nature being what it is, the people as a whole cannot be expected to feel for the business cause as deeply and as desperately

So why are they sitting around, like a pack of beaten hyenas, complaining that the kill has been stolen by a pair of totally inept and callous leaders?

I may be repeating the obvious, but the suspicion that the business community is wobbly at the knees must be voiced. And one is not referring to the wheeling dealing that all business, to some extent, has always been mired in, and will be, everywhere. What I am talking about is the lack of strength within the business community, as an institution, united in the common goal of protecting its interests.

If the business community were united in its primary objective, namely to ensure the survival of business in this country, perhaps the political leaders, and one refers to both of them equally, would not have managed to get away with as much as they have.

Granted, the business commu-

nity has made various attempts to bridge the differences between the two opposing sides. Even as I write, perhaps, there is a lobby moving to bring pressure to bear on the women at the helm. But how effective can any lobby hope to be if it consists of politically divided elements who will temper their moves to suit their personal loyalties to a political party? Is it not about time that a nonpartisan lobby took this matter in hand and made it clear that enough is really enough?

I wanted to ask him, this cousin of mine, these and many other questions. I wanted to tell him to do something, start a movement, lobby for change. And I would have, if our telephone conversation had not been unceremoniously aborted.

One moment he is going full steam about the disappointments of the last decade, the let downs by the two leaders, how dismaying it has been that the present incumbent has resorted to bad language, upped the ante, closed the door to negotiation, and the next minute, he is

"Oh, sorry," he exclaims. "It's my foreign buyer on the other line. Gotta go.." He hangs up. End of conversation. Also, perhaps, end of

I hope not. I hope people like my cousin will find a way to make themselves heard. It is no use complaining and bitterly accepting what appears to be yet another inevitable bad ending. No matter how much damage has been done, someone must try to pull the country back from the brink. Business has the clout, the power, the wherewithal, the access. Most of all, Business has

As someone terribly clever once remarked, money is the greatest equaliser. One can only hope they were right.

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.

# Stinking surroundings



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 thegutter

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 in 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, lets 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. Mojjamal 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

ASM Sohrab Hossain Kathal Bagan, Dhaka