

DHAKA SATURDAY DECEMBER 8, 2001

Ban on hartal

Political parties must think seriously before opposing it

T has been reported that the government is considering legislation to ban hartals. We think it is quite bold of the government to take this initiative. Given the nature of our politics it hardly seems possible that we will have any political consensus on this vital issue. If the government proposes such legislation the opposition will almost automatically oppose it. There it is left to the people in general, the civil society and professional groups in particular, to create the appropriate public opinion in this regard.

As a newspaper we are committed to upholding and strengthening democracy in every way we can. Freedom is the life-blood of free media and therefore we cannot be any party to any legislation that will curb people's democratic rights. It is from that perspective that we would like to judge the issues of hartal. First of all it must be distinguished from the right to strike and other internationally recognised and ILO backed workers' rights, which are not being questioned. Hartal in our country has become a weapon of terror. It is enforced through intimidation, threat and coercion. There is no democracy here but only brute force. Originally hartal was non-violent mass civic action of non-cooperation against the British colonialism. It was completely based on voluntary participation. There was no trace of coercion. The moment it became coercive it lost its democratic character. We have argued in the past that hartals can be an acceptable political weapon only against foreign rule (as it was against colonialism), and against military dictatorship (as it was against Ershad). But it cannot be a weapon against democratically elected governments with a parliament in place. Otherwise what is the importance of elections, the only time when the whole nation speaks.

Our opposition parties have a special fascination for hartals because they have become so intellectually bankrupt that they cannot think creatively of suitable alternatives. Their moral bankruptcy is exemplified by the fact that they never hesitate to put their narrow partisan interest above the interest of the people. The biggest proof of their duplicity and corrupt politics is the way they change their position on hartals depending on whether they are in power or in the opposition. Our opposition parties love hartals because they scrupulously avoid using the parliament as the basis of their politics. This is another tragic example of our bankrupt politics. We recall Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina singing parliament's praise when in power and decrying its efficacy when in the opposition. We are sick and tired of this double standard.

This must change now, once and for all. Realisation must dawn that hartals did nothing to the party in power and only made life miserable for the public. It did not shorten the tenure of either governments (BNP's or AL's) but greatly damaged the economy. The opposition's objective to harass the government actually ended up punishing the public. There is a perverted logic making the rounds now that the party that calls hartals ends up winning the election as the AL did in '96 and the BNP last October, and hence the present opposition should continue the practice. We suspect that it is with this future action in mind that the AL has already started opposing the BNP's suggestion to legislate against hartals. This is nothing but an argument of convenience and based only on a partial analysis of facts. Incumbents lost because of bad governance, which was of greater concern to the public. If the ruling parties governed better and the opposition called hartals then definitely the opposition would have been appropriately punished for their economydamaging and politically coercive hartals. In this age of globalisation and intense competitiveness, our economy, especially the export industries, will not survive, leave alone thrive, with more hartals. Therefore it must end. Please take note of the fact that hartals do not occur in any other country in the world. India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan (when under democracy) do not have hartals. Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines -- all nascent democracies -- do not indulge in hartals. Yes, there are strikes or work stoppages and we are all in favour of it as long as they are industry or trade specific. Strikes are seldom, if ever, aimed at debilitating the whole country as it is done here. Hartals must end if we are to ever become a possible destination for foreign investment. Economic growth is the only way to rescue our people from the grinding poverty from which they suffer. So if our politicians love the people as they claim, then they must stop calling hartals. We urge the public to seriously consider the points raised above.



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

he inevitable has happened. Immediately on return from the United States, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon sent helicopter gunships to attack President Arafat's headquarters and particularly targeted Arafat's helicopters and helipads at Gaza. For 20 minutes or so the helicopter gunships continued their missile attacks in the area and destroyed the helicopters and structures around the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority and Arafat's official residence. Luckily Arafat was in Ramallah at that time. Apparently the attack was aimed at him. The other areas including Jenin, Ramallah, Tulkarm were also attacked and tanks and armoured vehicles were used. The Palestinians have again come under total siege.

The second wave of attack was launched next day and was wider and more intense. F16, F15 and Apache helicopter gunships were used and these hit several Palestinian areas. 'Three missiles hit Palestinian police headquarters in Ramallah, some 50 meters from the headquarters of PA Chairman Yasser Arafat. His aides had noticed the helicopters and rushed him to a bomb shelter before the attack. reports Jerusalem Post. Thus he again luckily escaped unhurt. Israeli Defense Forces, however, insisted that Arafat's compound was not hit and was not a target. The second wave of attack took place immediately after Israeli cabinet meeting that declared Palestinian Authority "a terror-supporting entity". This was indeed done to justify Israeli attack on PA HQ, police and Palestinian security force 17. The bulldozers were used to plough up the landing strip of Gaza airport. So far two deaths were reported though many sustained injuries.

ment has come out from a person like Sharon as these words were

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres,

while speaking to the press in

Bucharest where he was there for

attending a conference, said he did

not agree with the cabinet declara-

tion and threatened to quit the Israeli

coalition, but later did not do it as

there was 50-50 split in the Labour

minute address to his nation saying

as reported by Jerusalem Post that

'PA leader is, was, and probably

always will be the biggest obstacle

Earlier Ariel Sharon made a 10-

leadership on the issue.

and are indeed still applicable to Ariel Sharon. The whole Intefada started because of Sharon and would, as the trend shows, continue as long as he remains in power. He is trying to pass the buck on to Arafat. A senior member of Israeli Peace

Coalition said in BBC interview after the Israeli attack that since Sharon came to power he had been working to destroy the Palestinian Authority (PA) as it wanted an independent Palestinian state against Sharon's commitment to occupy more of Palestinian land for new settlements. He also commented that the US might kill one bin Laden but this would produce 10 more bin Ladens. Similarly, more suicide bombers would be created because of Israeli retaliations. His view was that 'we all' must work for peace and give up retaliations as these go in circle. Retaliation will not bring peace. Israel's Justice Minister Ben Ami also said in a recent interview that Israel's settlement policy itself was wrong.

Immediately after the second round of Israeli military attack on the Palestinians, there was a third suicide bombing in Jerusalem that

records of any terrorist acts. These are to be noted before blaming Arafat for such bombings? Why not remove the causes for such brutal acts by withdrawing from the occupied land and allowing the Palestinians to have a state of their own? The whole world is committed to this but this is not being done. Once the Palestinians have a "viable state" without Israeli blockade, all forms of terrorism will stop. It seems worthless to continue to blame Arafat for something for which appears

Ariel Sharon's war against Yasser Arafat

killed the bomber and injured three

Israelis. This only shows that military

strikes cannot stop those who

decide to kill themselves and in the

process kill others who are consid-

beyond his control. Any way, the Palestinians have been resorting to such suicide bombings as they do not have the F16s, helicopter gunships etc. Two days back, Israel merrily bombed PA HQ in Gaza, but the Palestinians did not have even a machine gun let alone an anti-aircraft gun to shoot down the Israeli helicopters. Palestinians have been the silent receivers of the missiles and bombs. One does not have to justify a suicide bombing which is utterly a serious crime, but it's true that some Palestinian radicals resort to suicide bombings in the absence of any other means. The difference between the present Israeli authority and Palestinian radicals is that Israelis bomb Palestinians without

ered enemies. Any way, the suicide bombings have been taking place cannot reach the Israeli military. within Israel; why can't Israeli security forces stop it? How would Arafat's police know that a particular person was going to Israel to perform suicide bombing? The bomber does not make any prior announcement. And in many instances it's

loss of any life but Palestinians give and Hamas. their lives while hurling bombs on the Israelis. The most unfortunate part is that in such suicide bombings the ordinary Israelis become the targets as these suicide bombers

As one can see the present escalation of violence leading to a veritable war was the result of Sharon's recent targeted killing of radical Palestinian leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jehad. These have backfired and taken a heavy toll on the innocent Israeli civilians.

tinian school children by a road-side

bomb planted by Israeli security

forces to deter attacks against a

nearby settlement. As a result, a

series of suicide bombings on

December 2, 2001, rocked West

Jerusalem and Haifa and killed over

26 Israelis and injured more than

200 within the span of 12 hours. Any

sensible man would get horrified by

such attacks on civilians whether

they are Israelis or Palestinians or

are of any other race. There has

been world-wide condemnation and

particularly from the US administra-

tion. Ariel Sharon was in Washington

and was waiting to meet the US

President George Bush. Indeed,

President Bush advanced the

meeting schedule by a day, flew

back from Camp David and met Ariel

Sharon in the White House on

Sunday, December 2, 2001, Jerusa-

lem Post reports that Prime Minister

Ariel Sharon told President Bush

that 'since Chairman Arafat has

done nothing to prevent terrorism,

Israel will fight terrorism itself'.

Apparently President Bush made no

comment on that but reportedly told

Sharon that 'he is demanding that

Arafat immediately arrest the perpe-

trators of terrorist acts of last two

davs and take concrete and serious

actions against both Islamic Jehad

Unfortunately, the attacks took place at a time when US's special envoy Anthony Zinni was in the area to establish a cease-fire. As the situation stands now, it is all fire and

Earlier Chairman Arafat and other Palestinian leaders namely Nabil Sath, Saeb Erekat condemned the suicide bombings that killed so many innocent Israeli civilians. Indeed, Arafat declared state of emergency in the Palestinian territories and already arrested over 130 suspected terrorists mostly from

Islamic Jehad. As it was already a

state of emergency in the Palestin-

ian areas and arrests were going on

despite protests from many Pales-

tinians, Arafat should have been

given an opportunity to bring the

situation to a reasonable limit. But

unfortunately Sharon destroyed that

possibility. After having gone

through Israeli bombings and also

attack against Arafat's own head

office, Arafat and his establishments

should have very little interest or

incentives to go against Hamas and

Islamic Jehad. But still Arafat went

for further arrests and indeed put

Hamas spiritual leader Sk Yasin

under house arrest. This led to a mini

civil war in the Palestinian area.

Arafat's security forces are having

pounding from the Israelis as well as

from the radical Palestinians.

Despite all these Israel launched the

third military attack and destroyed

tation with President Mobarak, has

called for a meeting of the Arab

League soon. One has to see what

Jordan's king Abdullah, in consul-

two police buildings in Gaza.

of Sharon's rash military action against the Palestinians. Indeed, Sharon's action would achieve nothing in terms of stopping the violence. The situation is likely to be more volatile

Israelis living in the sea of Arabs should not have continued their military actions against Palestinians who have no means to defend themselves against Israeli military might. Once PA started arresting the suspected terrorists. Israel should have cooperated in rounding up more and particularly those who they see as terrorists. Instead Israel punished PA. It's comment that "Israel has the right to defend itself" was taken to be the green signal to go ahead against Palestinians. It was simply dangerous in this particular case as a person like Sharon is in charge. The time was also inappropriate as the US's special envoy Anthony Zinni was already there and the US should have anticipated the consequences on its envoy's work on a possible cease-fire

Now it seems from the reactions of the Arabs and probably from that of others too that the US could no longer be seen as a neutral broker in the peace process. Thus the peace process seems to have suffered some serious setback as the world was waiting for the US to act decisively after President Bush's important statement in the General assembly on "Palestine" followed by the statement of Secretary Colin Powell reassuring the world about the clear position of the US on the issue a Palestinian state. Indeed, it started well by dispatching Anthony Zinni to the area, but now Zinni's mission seems to have turned 'mission impossible' because of developments on the ground -- the suicide bombings by Hamas and Islamic Jehad on Israelis followed by Sharon's bombings on the Palestinians. The PA was caught in the middle. One can see the similarity of these actions in terms of their aiming at destroying the US' initiative for a cease-fire leading to the peace negotiations. Now peace appears to be the main casualty and in the process Palestinians continue to be

support Arafat gets from the Arab the sufferers. League. Whatever may be the result of the meeting of the Arab League, Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and the US led coalition to fight terror Ambassador and founder President of North South would undoubtedly suffer a set back. University US interest is likely to suffer because

Hamid Karzai: Priority for stability and security of Afghanistan

Afghan leaders for the next two and half years requested for a peace-keeping UN force in the country after much HARUN UR RASHID

N a historic decision in Germany, on 5th December the

lowed by a convention of the elders (inhabited by Pushtuns, central part jirga) to elect another administration by Hazaras, north east by Tajiks and for two years. That administration north-west by Uzbeks. It is a country will frame a new democratic constiwhere five languages are spoken. tution under which a free and fair However Pashtu, Dari and Persian election will be held in Afghanistan. are dominant languages. During the last 23 years of inter-This is a road map settled by the

necine fighting the country has been devastated in all sectors of econ-The delegates have also omy and infrastructures. Landmines are everywhere. The country will need massive dose of foreign hesitation. A multi-national UN assistance for at least 10 years to

Mr Hamid Kazai is the chief of Pashtun tribe Populzai. His family comes from Karz, a village 3 km from Kandahar from which he takes his family name. His father Abdul Ahad Karzai was two-term Speaker of the Parliament in the late 70s. He was jailed by the communist regime in the country and he escaped from house arrest in 1981 and set up a base in Quetta (Pakistan) to work against the Soviet occupation in the 80s. He was opposed to the Taliban

Hamid Karzai is reported to be an ally of the exiled Afghan King Zahir Shah (a Pashtun) who was toppled in a 1973 coup by his cousin Daud while he was on a visit to Italy. The King remained there since then, The King is likely to return to Kabul to become a symbolic head to unite all ethnic groups in the country. As soon as the US launched an attack in Afghanistan on October 7. Hamid Kazai entered secretly into Afghanistan and was one of the first

priority would be the stability and security of the country. He has a difficult task ahead to bring some of the important factions within the fold of his government as these factions were not represented in the Bonn meeting. Two of the war lords General Dostum and General Ismail -- must be brought on board by Hamid Karzai. Dostum occupies the northern city Mazar e-Sharif and Ismail the western Herat city. Both have a large following in their respective regions

The whole world will be watching anxiously whether the factional Afghan leaders have the will to



to peace and stability in the Middle observed that these are done by Added was the killing of five Pales-East.' It's an irony that such a stateyoung people who have no previous SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Now it seems from the reactions of the Arabs and probably from that of others too that the US could no longer be seen as a neutral broker in the peace process... Indeed, it started well by dispatching Anthony Zinni to the area, but now Zinni's mission seems to have turned 'mission impossible' because of developments on the ground -- the suicide bombings by Hamas and Islamic Jehad on Israelis followed by Sharon's bombings on the Palestinians.

four Afghan factions signed their agreement for the interim government in Afghanistan brokered by the UN in the presence of the Chancellor of Germany. It has been a landmark victory for the Afghan people and the UN. Many analysts did not hope for such a quick agreement. At one stage the negotiation was touch and go in the secluded castle of Petersberg on a mountain top, near Bonn -- the venue of the meeting for one week.

Some analysts believe that younger generation of leaders from the influential Northern Alliance/United Front sidelined their President Burhanuddin Rabbani to strike the deal with the other factions. The elderly leader was believed not to be acting in a positive manner from Kabul and wanted to continue to lead the new government.

The delegates decided that Hamid Karzai (45) will head the interim administration for next six months from December 22, fol-

BOTTOM LINE

The whole world will be watching anxiously whether the factional Afghan leaders have the will to implement the terms of the agreement (consisting of seven pages) in letter and spirit they had agreed to in Bonn. If they adhere to the agreement, billions of dollars will be poured in the country as the international community including the US, Germany, Britain and France are ready to assist the country with money and materials. This time it appears that Afghanistan will not be forgotten by them.

peace-keeping force will be stationed at first in Kabul to bring security in the capital. A UN Security Council resolution will be adopted soon in this respect. Bangladesh and Indonesia have reportedly made offers to provide their personnel in the UN peace-keeping force.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country with about 25 million people. There are main four ethnic groups in the country -- Pashtuns Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras (Shi'ites). Pushtuns constitute about 44 per cent of the population and are in majority. The rest ethnic groups are minorities. South and east are

get on its feet. It is an awesome task for the new leaders of Afghanistan. The watchful eyes of the international community and the UN will be constantly on the conduct of the leaders of the country.

It is reported that Mr. Karzai will head a 29-member administration of which two will be women. The UN saw that the fundamental rights of the women in Afghanistan are restored as soon as possible and the inclusion of the two women in the cabinet gives a positive signal to women in the country who were brutalised by the extremist Taliban regime since 1996

regime and was assassinated by Taliban gunmen in 1999 at the age of 75 when he walked home from his neighbourhood.

Hamid Kazai was quickly elected as the tribal chief after the death of his father. Hamid took economics degree from the University of Simla in India and speaks English fluently. His wife, Zeenat, is a physician who does voluntary work among the Afghan refugees. Those who know Hamid Karzai say that he is honest, articulate and combines the tribal tradition with the modern. He was a Deputy Foreign Minister of the country before the Taliban regime.

Pashtun leaders to take arms against the Talibans in southern Afghanistan. It was reported that US helicopters rescued him from a Taliban attack a week after he sneaked into Afghanistan. He has been determined to capture his home city -- Kandahar. Of late he led strong contingent of 1500 anti-Taliban fighters to dislodge the Talibans from Kandahar. He told BBC that he would be back in Kabul by 22 December to lead the administration

Hamid Karzai in an interview in September told that he wanted a democratic Afghanistan. His first

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Nuclear power

Following an article in the New York Times (November 28, 2001, page A27) about a "debate in Pakistani military and political circles about whether its nuclear expertise should be shared with other Muslim countries" (see my letter dated November 5, 2001), Israel's prime minister is in Washington to urge an assault on Pakistan to strip it of its nuclear weapons capability including personnel and impose Irag-like inspections, etc., on it. Pakistan will have to race against time to ensure that its nuclear

weapons capability is effectively deployed and multiplied in other muslim countries (for example, weapons in north Africa can immediately target London, Paris, etc.). Satish Chandra, on e-mail

Two sides of the same coin

When the people voted for the ruling party, it was under the assumption that things could not get any worse and, law and order had to improve.

To my disappointment there has been no change in the situation, merely an exchange of hands.

It seems to me that the government high ups are genuinely interested in validating their election pledges but the truth (which I am quite sure the party will deny) is that they have lost complete control over their grassroots level workers and activists, who are acting as they please.

It is also guite pointless changing DCs, SPs etc when it is the SI's and OC's who are the frontline workers for enforcing administration policy. A few days ago I've read in the newspaper the article about an attack on a Chinese company stating that the OC of the station refused to accept the case from the company officials. They had to resort to complaining to higher authorities. Which foreign investor would want to invest in a situation

such as this. Such negligence should be met with immediate suspension, forfeiture of any benefits, and a fine. I'm sure that if correct measures were taken to reprimand the lower officers correctly

the government would be more successful in implementing their policy of crime eradication.

As one of the election pledges the ruling government promised to repeal the Special Powers Act and Public Safety Act, yet we see Shahriar Kabir is detained under the Special Powers Act; This is blatant hypocrisy. People have the right to know the truth unless it is a matter of national security or against public interest.

When deciding whether to grant bail the court must consider matters which are universal and applied everywhere rather than be capricious

The Law Minister being an eminent barrister must be aware of this and yet he does not address this problem. Yet no effective enforcement mechanism has been applied to ensure that rule of law is applied with neutrality.

In Naraynganj, garment factories are being forced to sell their waste to terrorists claiming to be ruling party activists. How can the LGRD Minister boast of not patronising terrorists when it is blatantly obvious that a) the politicians are harbouring terrorists or, b) they have no control over their activists.

What worries me the most is that the common man has lost all respect for rule of law and has taken an active decision to take the matter into his own hands. Muggers are being killed on the spot before returning the body, policemen are being held hostage and police stations are being attacked; this all points to an anarchic situa-

They should deal with relevant matters rather than those, which do not deserve the importance in the current situation (such as Security Bill for Sheikh Hasina and Family, and allocation of Ganobhabon). I realise it is easier said than done but where there is a will there is a way. RH

Law Student, UK

Setting the nation to the right direction

I had kept myself stuck to the internet as the results of the Oct 1 general elections was coming out in despite having immense workload. To put it quite simply, it's natural selection. Of course, I don't mean to sound like "Now under the leadership of the new government everything will flourish." But, at least, most of the people would not have to inhale the fume of bitter and choking exhaust coming out of the very mouths of the AL top-tier leadership and their sycophants from within the self-proclaimed intellectuals

some of the Bangladesh portals

Of course, the aura of good feeling has already started to crumble as I had been watching the events that ensued Oct 1. While the irresistible muscle flexing of hooligans in a new bottle has once again started to cloud the air around the peaceful masses, the new party in power is expected to analyse the reasons that made it victorious by such a colossal margin. The vision that they put forward

before the nation-- to eradicate corruption, poverty and repression of the hooligans -- may sound simple and sweet, but very difficult to achieve in reality. The think tanks of BNP should translate its mission into short and intermediate term objectives that would allow people to see through the outcomes. Why not the objectives be spelled out in measurable terms such as setting a particular figure for GDP growth, targeting establishments to make them corruption free or bringing down murders, mugging, toll collections, robbery, etc. in measurable terms. That would help the government evaluate its performance over time, make its activities transparent to the people and discover the loopholes that make the progress stymied.

Malick Musfique Reza

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Success as a yardstick

One of the most successful companies in the US (chaired by the world's richest man, bill Gates. worth around USD 70 billion) is facing lawsuit on charges of alleged monopoly moves in the computer software filed. The stunning US military suc-

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

cess in Afghanistan is being viewed differently in the Islamic world of 1.2 billion Muslims. There are countless success stories of big operators in the Islamic world of 1.2 billion Muslims. There are countless success stories of big operators in the black-market, including the sale of drugs to the addicts (in some countries the addicts face death sentence). Many terrorist groups in many countries have made money by the million, and are living a 'successful' life of opulence. For how long? How dishonesty disinte-

grates ultimately. Marcos could not digest or hide his ill-gotten wealth, as well as many Prime Ministers or head of state in many countries. Why many politicians become

rich and successful? Henry Ford, who first mass-produced the motor car, distributed his wealth away to produce more vehicles at cheaper prices. His vision was to see a car in every middle-class home. He did not wish to become rich. The difference is very subtle in today's materialistic world.

The student fronts of political parties in the Third World countries are allowed unethical excesses-for whose benefit and for whose suffering? The politicisation of the established institutions bring quick gains to the transient political regimes; but at what expense to others?

What is the difference between deep, inner success, and subjective success? The practitioners in today's fast-changing world are facing a big question: looking at success as a vardstick. What is the role of objectivity? Who pays for the sin of spoiling the new and future

generations? The definition of business is to provide better service, while the profit will take of itself. Short cuts and lack of quality control are deadly public sins. Cosmetic service has no meaning without the right motivation behind it. We tend to overlook one component of the flow-chart-the role of Cosmic forces. It is like flowing water -- very

ΑZ Dhaka

penetrative.

implement the terms of the agree ment (consisting of seven pages) in letter and spirit they had agreed to in Bonn. If they adhere to the agreement, billions of dollars will be poured in the country as the international community including the US, Germany, Britain and France are ready to assist the country with money and materials. This time it appears that Afghanistan will not be forgotten by them. Hamid Karzai is a next genera-

tion Afghan leader from the domi-

nant Pashtun tribe. He has trav-

elled widely and is known to be a

sophisticated person. It was a

sensible decision for the four Afghan

factions to agree on his leadership

A new Afghanistan is being born and

the people of Bangladesh welcome

the new Afghanistan into family of

nations Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva