

## AL should withdraw the hartal call

### Goodwill from joining JS mustn't be spoilt

Completely out of context, the AL has called for a half-day hartal on July 4. The opposition party has turned a volte-face on its earlier resolve to ingratiate itself with the public by engaging the ruling party on the floor of the House. It gave the people to understand that all issues will be taken to parliament instead of being tested on the street. The people simply loved their change of heart to join the Jatiya Sangsad after eight months of emasculating the parliamentary system by a stand off from the day one. So upbeat they felt that they started living down the negative image of the opposition which had virtually betrayed public trust by their long absenteeism in parliament. The brief spell of opposition participation in the JS marked by a dour defense of their position on various issues aroused hopes of a healthy bounce-back to normality in national politics.

The speech made by SAMS Kibria and other AL leaders enlivened the proceedings of the House as people got a flavour of those together with reactions from the Treasury Bench through the media. And for the short while that the telecasts were made the opposition for the first time did not carp from the wings that their performance in the parliament was being deliberately underplayed. It was parliamentary democracy in action and the audience liked the return of the old parliamentary ways. The opposition's stock of goodwill with the public was raised accordingly.

But all of this seems in jeopardy now. By declaring the hartal public appreciation of the opposition's return to the political mainstream is being foolishly undercut. And the irony is the AL has not abandoned the parliamentary option; it has merely said the party would join the parliament after the passage of the budget. The question is, why then step back from a forward foothold by calling hartal out of the blue?

The impulsive nature of the hartal call is transparent as it has been made on the heels of the arrest of former mayor Hanif's son Khokan. Pegged to this incident, a list of other party detainees has been put up to reiterate the charges of government's repression of the opposition. Khokan's arrest under Section 54 of the CrPc smacks of arbitrary use of power. But the point is, while one can sympathise with the AL's demand for an end to the ruling party's ham-handed treatment towards them, one simply cannot endorse their methods of calling hartals.

The AL must withdraw the hartal call and take issues with the government on to the floor of the House.

## FIFA CUP ends amidst confirmation of greatness

### Tribute to hosts for magnificent arrangement

The joy of the Cup runneth over. The victory of Brazil for the fifth time has sent its supporters into ecstasy. There are 'Yellow' followers all over the world and as the Brazilians danced the samba, many Bangladeshis shared that happy beat. In the end the samba had overcome the clock-work.

Interestingly, neither Brazil nor Germany looked favourites when the preliminaries were on. Brazil in fact barely made it and Germany's path to the competition was not glorious either. Yet the power, tenacity, stamina and resolve to win the Cup prevailed in the end. When Brazil and Germany clashed in the final they had actually achieved something splendid. In a tournament where most major football playing countries were felled by emerging powers of the soccer world, the two teams withstood the assault from the brave new world of countries challenging the old order, Germany and Brazil in fact made the honour of the old order safe. In the end, the two most consistent and regular finalists battled it out proving class ultimately wins.

But this world cup is also about the many new faces and teams which have left a permanent mark on global football. African football has shown its stellar quality despite its less than expected performance but Senegal has held the flag of that continent high. To many of the poorer world, victories are not as much about sports as its about standing tall amidst ruined economies and societies. Football is much more than sports.

But it's Asia, represented by the co-hosts Japan and South Korea who have stunned the football world. The skepticism of the world held about Asian football will now be over. It's true that home advantage had played a role but the enormous stride made by Asian soccer teams is now accepted by all. The future will certainly see many more of the teams, many waiting in the wings.

The fall of the giants in many cases was an unexpected sight and sometimes strange to watch but it confirmed that even the great fail and the world is essentially uncertain. Here is a humbling feeling that we must accept.

And in seeing the two truly great teams battle it out, we have also sensed the certainty of seeing that in the end greatness will have its day. That feeling is exhilarating and humbling too. Goodbye FIFA 2002. See you in 2004.

## An epitaph for Adamjee

### How come the rich always decide what happens to the poor ?



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

In every neighbourhood and para, crackers went off and people celebrated the victory of Brazil in the FIFA Cup. Brazil was to many "our team" and when Ronaldo put in two and vanquished the Germans, joy exploded in our world. If the rains hadn't come down with such a vengeance, we would have seen processions on the street. It was seven. Barely three hours later, Adamjee jute mills would be buried. It had already died. There were no mourners except those who had died with it.

WE know the names of the super stars, the prizes, the quizzes and the whole carnival that has accompanied the Cup. But we have forgotten the names of the girl who broke down and fainted learning that her school was losing down. She's no star, she is just a school girl. She has been held guilty for the loss sustained by Adamjee Jute Mills. She has been punished along with her family. That girl, like many like her, will have to pay for official inefficiency, corruption and lack of planning. This is also called 'good governance' and 'economic reform.'

"Adamjee closure will be good for the economy," a friend said on the phone. "We are forced to pay for the loss."

He is a millionaire and pays less tax than I do.

WE had motored down the long road in the mid sixties to see Adamjee Jute Mills. It was then the largest jute mill in the world. The

man who accompanied us couldn't hide his pride. "I have been here since it began. It's what has made Pakistan rich. It has made us important. We may not be rich but we have something which has made the world know us."

Inside the gates, it seemed to be a world of its own. Almost everything seemed to be there. Schools, shops, clinics.

"This is a miracle." One of the managers said, "but the workers

? And what is the amount of retrenched worker's compensation?

How come senior bureaucrats all have fancy houses in Gulshan and Baridhara mixing with the rich and the famous?

How come they get black money breaks in budgets while schools are demolished?

HOW much did we loose in Magurchara?

How much money was made in

repaired for a rupee. The boy said nothing. Too much? Too little? I don't know.

I came inside the hotel and told of the incident to my colleagues. An Afghan sitting at the cash counter overheard us.

"Our voices are built with sands. They are carried away by the winds before anyone can hear."

Did you hear what Adamjee's closure says?

DID we hear their voices, these

arrive the cache of arms and the freedom fighters who were hidden, protected and assisted by the workers. The slums of Adamjee has more footsteps of the liberation war soldiers than many other places.

So many were killed. And the Pak army too knew that which is why so many had to suffer. The dream of the workers wasn't a red paradise but a full belly.

We can't afford Adamjee so we have to let go.

So how come we can afford a

owners' thugs began to fire. Two workers fell into the canal from the makeshift bridge. The workers retaliated with home made bombs. The sounds and screams were loud and one couldn't see much beyond the smoky haze.

"Keep your head down BBC," the man screamed. They have already killed. But then a roar went up as the holiday gates of Adamjee opened and men started to pour out.

The roar increased, "Adamjee. Adamjee. Adamjee."

Nothing changed, nothing happened but for a brief moment the poor were not afraid. Adamjee did that.

THE man was weeping and asking the simplest of questions.

"What will I do now? What will happen to my family? To my children?"

How come those who decide to close Adamjee always make it and those who get sacked never make it. How come the rich always decide what happens to the poor?

How come we are relieved that a loss making unit is closed without understanding an iota of what that means?

AS the rains shook the deserted streets of Karwan Bazar as people had gone home to watch the Cup, three young boys, stark naked, played on the smooth verandah of a bank, sliding on the tiles. They felt no shame and we didn't feel bothered either. We stand on the same ground but in different worlds. We can't understand each other's shame, because we are invisible to each other.

Tomorrow they shall join another factory -- if they are lucky -- till it's milked dry by the owners and their cronies in the government -- and then when there is nothing left to suck, close it down.

Like Adamjee.

Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

## STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

AS the rains shook the deserted streets of Karwan Bazar as people had gone home to watch the Cup, three young boys, stark naked, played on the smooth verandah of a bank, sliding on the tiles. They felt no shame and we didn't feel bothered either. We stand on the same ground but in different worlds. We can't understand each other's shame, because we are invisible to each other.

are the miracle workers." In bygone days if you were poor and needed a miracle to survive, Adamjee lent a swift, sometimes irregular hand. It was a space where the workers could breathe free for a few weeks. Sometimes months.

THE government and its sponsors, the donors, have said it all. The Stateowned enterprise was losing money, more money than it was possible to sustain. It was always losing money. Yet those connected with Adamjee have almost all become rich. The real rich have been those who were the policy and decision makers whose daughters don't have to faint because the school is being demolished brick by brick.

"Where does your child study? It will tell you who you are."

WHAT about Biman? When is Biman going to be closed down? And loan defaults have gone up as the Bangladesh Bank Governor said. And the loss giving state ceremonies which can keep so many families going?

How much does a Biman pilot get

the Frigate purchase.. the MIG-buying, the distillery licence? How much? How much?

HOW many children will lose their chance of becoming educated? Coming as it does in the wake of an energetic education policy, we all have the responsibility to ask this question. We have this responsibility even more because so many of our children study in the finest schools, colleges and universities of the world. Outside Bangladesh.

Who is going to keep the schools going inside Adamjee? I know Harvard will have no problem because our children study there, LSE is our responsibility to keep going and even old Jadavpur in Kolkata isn't doing too bad but what about the school seeing which die the girl fainted?

I don't know whether they still have the restaurant in Islamabad called "Afghan" where they sold real Afghan bread and kabab skewered in fierce short swords. In front of the eatery, refugees would sometimes gather or meet. A nail bothered my shoe. I had it

workers for whom we have offered no options? In the oligarchy of the rich that is Bangladesh, there are few voices and certainly none that are strong enough to be listened to. There is something strangely perverse about the general estimate that the last general election campaign cost was Taka 300 crores to 500 crores apart from the administrative cost of running the elections. And failing to generate industrial projects from concerns and closing them down.

"But this is the price you have to pay for democracy?" "A democracy which can't give enough to the people to eat?" "You don't want elections?"

"What about food for the hungry and schools for children?" "Soon, soon. We shall have it all. It's by closing Adamjee that we can..."

The politician didn't even bother to complete his sentence. He didn't need to.

How long is soon? How long is soon? What is soon?

WHEN the huge jute carrying boats would anchor at Adamjee, so would

Mercedes Benz showroom in the city which is the capital of one of the poorest county of them all?

Which is more important? Debates on portraits or exhuming ancient corpses or filling empty bellies?

WE were sitting in a school in Adamjee. The young girl who sat opposite me was smart and surprisingly confident for a 14-year old.

"I want to give you a gift?" "What gift? I don't want a gift? Please."

"Don't worry Bhaiya. You are a bhadrolak and I know that. What can I give you? I will give you a song to remember."

"That gift will be a pleasure. Sing."

She held me in a steely gaze and sang.

"Amar sonar bangla, ami tomai bhalobashi."

She wept as she sang. Why that song of all the songs?

THE workers had revolted and were trying to cross a bridge just opposite Adamjee. I had not planned to cover a shoot-out but the police and

## Freedom and tolerance under pressure: Where is the Opposition?

PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

NOTHING has recently dented India's image as a democracy with a free press as badly as the deplorable raid on Tehelka and the government's paranoid reaction to a *Time* magazine article by Alex Perry about Prime Minister Vajpayee's health.

There can be two opinions about the accuracy of some of Perry's observations. For instance, there are mistakes about Mr Vajpayee's age (he is 77, not 74) and the range of his ailments. However, there can be no dispute that Mr Vajpayee is far from physically fit and has an attention-span problem.

The general thrust of Perry's piece is absolutely sound. Nor can there be any dispute about his right to write the article, based on freely circulating information. Irreverent writing about national leaders, like cartooning or lampooning them, is part of the media staple in a democracy.

New Delhi's peevish reaction to Perry's story speaks of immaturity. It is especially deplorable because the allegations he makes have already appeared in the Indian and foreign media, including Mr Vajpayee's bladder and kidney troubles, his taste for fried food and fatty sweets, and his interminably long pauses.

Recently, *The Washington Post* editorialised: "Toss a question at ... Vajpayee, ... and it hangs aloft for an eternity as he dismantles each dependent clause ..."

Then Vajpayee begins an answer that will stretch across eons of pauses and epochs of vanilla, invariably leaving his interrogators guessing..."

New Delhi harassed Perry by getting the Foreigners Regional

ment's Press Information Bureau, who happens to be the son-in-law of Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani.

Journalist Geelani has been subjected to harsh interrogation since June 9. The police planted stories that he "confessed" to receiving ISI funds--something the detainee could not possibly counter. In judicial custody, he was brutally assaulted by jail inmates on June

under onerous pressure--through market censorship, political and commercial interests' lobbying, and now the Cable Television (Regulation) Amendment Bill.

Once passed, this will make installing "set-top" boxes compulsory for cable-television viewers. Besides raising subscriber costs, the law will allow the government to decide which channels we can watch. All "inconvenient" channels

ment of the almost-war border situation to a government they do not trust because of its communal jingoism. Some, like the Congress, entered vague reservations about the military brinkmanship, but didn't outline their own independent approach.

\* There was a conflict of interest in allowing Reliance Petrochemicals to bid for IPCL. Reliance stands blacklisted for breach of official

Farooq Abdullah and his son.

One hopes the Opposition doesn't believe that the Vajpayee disposition will be automatically replaced by a secular alliance, or that the electorate will spare it the democratic obligation to formulate alternative policies.

After the People's Front collapse, and the Congress's relative stagnation--it is unable to break the critical barrier in the Hindi heartland--no alternative coalition is in formation.

As for new visions, the nation desperately needs them. The electorate has become demanding. It wants new policies--to produce more jobs, restore food security, improve law and order, and promote tolerance.

An inarticulate, confused Opposition signifies an immature and weak democracy, where the winner-takes-all principle prevails, and where policy issues are not vigorously debated. Without such debate, the people's grievances cannot find either voice or redressal. Democracy itself loses its mass character and becomes elitist.

That's the ideal environment for the forward march of the Right-wing, indeed neofascism. The Opposition should not become complicit in this.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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Registration Office (FRRO) to summon him to "explain" why he holds three passports. Many Western governments allow frequent travellers more than one passport booklet. Some even allow dual citizenship. The British have clarified as much.

The Vajpayee government has cut a sorry figure with its boorish intolerance towards legitimate criticism. It is only a coincidence that this happened on the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emergency.

*Time* should not apologise for the story. Far more shameful than Perry's harassment is the persecution of Tehelka, and of Iftikhar Geelani, *The Kashmir Times* bureau chief, accredited with the govern-

20. Such methods seriously offend civil liberties, and disgrace the police and the home ministry. The beating up of detainees by hardened criminals cannot occur without the warders' collusion and political encouragement.

Geelani's treatment is related to the government's evolving Kashmir policy. This policy seems designed to physically repress critical currents. Its wisdom is open to question.

However, our political Opposition is doing little to passionately defend press freedom or interrogate official policies.

Its first failure will have serious consequences as the media comes

can be instantly switched off.

There has been no worthwhile debate on the Bill. The Opposition has been even less articulate on policy matters, where it lets the ruling coalition call the shots.

The nomination of Mr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam as the Presidential candidate is a stark example of this. The record on the confrontation with Pakistan, on Kashmir, economic policy or foreign affairs is not much better.

\* The Opposition welcomed the Lahore summit and the Agra process--and a *detente* with Pakistan. Yet, when the government suddenly turned against reconciliation and threatened Islamabad, the Opposition turned tail.

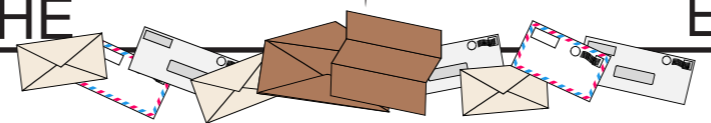
\* Most parties left the manage-

secrets. But the Opposition was passive as IPCL was privatised. Indian Oil too rigged its bid.

\* The milking of VSNL by Tata Telesystems is a flagrant case of fraud: you take over a public sector company by paying Rs. 1,100 crores and get it to advance you Rs. 1,200 crores! This riled even Pramod Mahajan and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, but it didn't provoke an Opposition protest.

\* The Opposition has failed to nail the disastrous "national security" policies pursued by pseudo-Sardar L.K. Advani, nor questioned his maligning of Indian Muslims as Pakistan's Fifth Columnists. It has merely watched the Kashmir policy mess, further manipulated by Dr

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



### Brazil won but aesthetic football defeated

Defensive football is prevailing and it has been proved successful. Most teams played defensive football and they were more cautious about defending their own goalpost rather than scoring goal. Therefore, the spectators didn't get as much pleasure as they expected.

**Oil Md. Abdullah Chowdhury**  
*Khasdobar, Sylhet*

### Sports column

I am an ardent reader of this excellent newspaper. Your World Cup 2002 coverage has been outstanding. But I have noticed that the online version of the sports column doesn't include as many articles or journals (i.e. Tvangle by Shayam Khan) by our Bangladeshi writers or columnist as Reuters or AFP.

It is always nice to read local journalistic viewpoint on any subject matter along with articles from international news agencies.

**Sultan Faiz**  
*Minnesota, USA*

### Tareq Zia and hartal

I give about as much weight to Tareq Rahman shunning hartals as I did Hasina promising not to call any. Politicians are fond of bleating about their sanctity while in power but watch out when we kick them out.

Just wait and see, Tareq will be forced, due to oppression by AL, to call hartals. After all hell hath no fury like a politician scorned.

**Dorji Dhaka**

### Want to help the mother who sold her child

I was going through the news "A mother after all" (June 29). I would like to help the mother financially so that she does not have to attempt the same thing again. Could her address be sent to me please?

**One of your readers**  
*One-mail, Dhaka*

*She is missing and no one as yet knows where she is. If she is located, you shall be informed. Thanks.*

- Editor.

### Media-friendly environment

I read your compact and constructive post editorial "Free press is main safeguard for democracy" (June 25) with great interest.

We hope the media and the government will work in juxtaposition tandem for the betterment of the nation. Just like people do not expect the media to go overboard with adjective safaris or pushy reports irritating and annoying the

government, it is also expected that the government to tolerate the commentaries and faultfinding in a good spirit to improve the governance.

Media is now seen as the only option in absence of ombudsman as check valve for any magniloquence and over see the transparency of the government. It is true the more the people know the better for the people and the government, and it is only the media can play this pivotal role.

All said and done, it is sad that the people are mystified as the co-operation sought by the elderly statesman of BNP- the Finance Minister is disregarded by barring the private television channels from covering the proceeding of the House when Awami League made its appearance in the Parliament. The 53 years old Awami League has been deprived of this opportunity, whereas the ruling party vowed to give equal opportunity including media coverage.

**Billy I Ahmed**  
*Dhaka*

### Sorry for BNP supporters

Resignation that shocked the nation has apparently disappointed and embarrassed most of the supporters of ruling party. Some of them gave their reaction in this column. Anjali Akbar (June 26) feels that the President had to go for being neu-

tral. But BNP is now accusing B. Chowdhury for conspiring with AL and Ex-Army chief to oust the present BNP government. My question to all BNP supporters is that if you cannot trust Dr. Chowdhury who is the founder secretary general of the party how can you trust other party people? B. Chowdhury could not prove his loyalty even after producing his epic *Shabash Bangladesh*. Imagine what will be the faith of others.

**ZK**  
*Banani, Dhaka*

### Shameful

BNP's parliamentary committee has shown three specific reasons for B Chowdhury's removal.

First, he didn't visit the late President Zia's mazar. Secondly, he didn't mention Maj. Zia's name as the announcer of Independence War. And third, the son of ex-president, Mr. Mahi Chowdhury once, after taking oath as a MP, welcomed Sheikh Hasina during her visit at Munshiganj.

What Mr. Mahi did is quite contrary to our ongoing political culture. And his father Mr. B Chowdhury took a stand as neutral as possible for a President who is also a party member. We may not see such democratic attitude afterwards because our politicians rarely take moves without self and party interest.

Moreover the resignation clearly

indicates in what manner the BNP will run democracy -- we have two third majorities so we can do anything.

**Mamunur Rashid**  
*Dhaka*

### In the name of democracy

We are not interested how the ruling party manages the country in their daily activities but surely all of us would demand from the elected party men to ensure corruption free society and transparency of their wealth and application of power vested on them by the people. It is only when corruption, the number one enemy is ruthlessly eliminated, the other equally formidable number one enemy worst ever prevailing law and order situation will have natural recourse to improve. Vice versa when the law and order situation would equally ruthlessly be enforced corruption would automatically dwindle and fade away, if not totally eliminated.

But who will establish rule of law? The politicians? Instead, with the people's money the MPs and ministers are building their personal castles, futures and fortunes and Prime Minister is watching from the observatory tower atop the party hierarchy showing her innocence.

We want to leave in peace and not in state of seize and terror in the

name of so-called democracy.

**Badrul Alam**  
*Cambridge, USA*

### "Excess profit tax"?

In the revisions for national budget, the Finance Minister includes a "15 per cent 'excess profit tax' on the excessive profits by banks to 'encourage' the banks to reduce lending rates". This is utterly confusing!

First, what is the definition of "excessive profit"? Secondly, as the government is indirectly admitting that banks make excessive/abnormal profits, how did the banks manage to do so in the first place, being under statutory regulations and all their tariff and charges being set by the government! Is this term "excess profit tax" a new one for the whole world--an invention by Mr Saifur Rahman?

Instead of revising the tariff and schedule of charges to prevent the banks from making such hefty profits at the expenses of businesses and individuals, why is the government trying to find an excuse just to share the spoils-- sort of a "black income" by the banks? Actually, as far as my knowledge goes, the deposit and lending rates are given by the government itself as ranges or limits.

**A Distressed Observer**  
*Chittagong*

**SOS**  
The SOS policy for vessels is fol-

lowed everywhere in the world. But in Bangladesh there is no such policy. Even there is no system or opportunity for a SOS during disaster. Bangladesh is a riverine country and there are myriad vessels and merchant boats that run on different river routes. And every year a number of accidents are taking place on the waterways for different reasons--natural or man made.

But the government has not taken any measure for prevention. So I think the government must implement the system of SOS immediately and thus ensure safe travelling on the waterways.

**Rafiq Bin Hai**  
*Mymensingh*

### Sarkar Sir

I just visited the St. Joseph's alumni webpage (<http://www.josephite89.org/>) and saw that Mr. Abdul Mannan Sarkar (Sarkar Sir) passed away on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June.

Am I mistaken or was there no obituary in *The Daily Star*? Sarkar Sir was one of the best teachers in St. Josephs. But perhaps the most endearing memory I have which I am sure will be shared by many Josephites, was his habit of hitting us with two rulers at once.

Funny how it's things like that you remember affectionately in the course of time.

**MA, Dhaka**  
**A biased US Middle**

### East policy

The much waited US Middle East peace policy was declared by the US President. In his speech the US president called for replacement of Yasser Arafat. It is totally against all democratic principles and norms. The US President can not dictate who will be the Palestinian leader.

**CM Mustahid**  
*Mirpur, Dhaka*

### Promoting adulterated products

I fail to understand how the authorities are allowing hawkers all over the country to openly purchase old containers of various makes and items. Surely these containers of viz., soybean oil, olive oil, aerosol insect spray, medicine, cream, powder, cologne, fragrance etc. are used for wrongful purposes and thereby inundating markets with adulterated products. Selling and purchasing of such items should be banned. The proprietary manufacturers should have ways and means to collect these for recycling purpose as far as possible and destroy the unusable ones. This system is already implemented abroad. Will the concerned authorities do something about this?

**A. Baree, Dhaka**