

Intolerance gripping our politics

People's suffering reaching its limit

THE government's total failure to contain criminals and all sorts of anti-social elements had already made our life intolerable. And now the opposition's hartal spree is making it almost impossible. It seems both the government and the opposition are bent on punishing the ordinary people -- one by its lack of governance and doing practically nothing to give the people even a minimum sense of security and the other by its determination to create as much obstacle to normal life as possible.

The government, in the name of ruling has actually ruined the country in as many ways as possible. Today our shopkeepers, businessmen and women, teachers, journalists, etc are all out in the streets asking the government for protection of their lives and property which is every government's prime duty. For the last two and half years that this government has been in power, there have been several terrorist bomb attacks, dozens of gruesome murders, several cases of arson, loot, high level robbery and hundreds of cases of rape and violence against women. Practically nothing has been done in any of the major cases. Most shocking has been the government's silence on the huge arms caches that were discovered -- in some cases quite accidentally -- by the police. Till today we have been told nothing about where such huge arms came from, where were they headed, who were behind them and how much progress the government has made in solving these cases. What we got instead is continuous and fabricated accusations against the opposition. We call them fabricated for the simple reason that the government till date has been unable to provide even an iota of proof substantiating its claim.

All this has naturally created a serious credibility gap about what the government says. Its silence on the crucial law and order issues has only added credence to the public suspicion about government's inability to control the situation. A total sense of unease has now gripped public life.

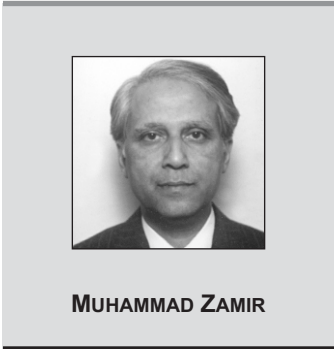
To all this we now have the added hurdle of passing our already hard life and making our ends meet with hartals. We have said for the umpteenth times and will continue to do so that hartal does not punish the government, it punishes the people in whose name the opposition is agitating. Instead of sympathising with the plight of the ordinary people whose lives have already become insecure and full of tension and worry, the opposition is making it even harder by calling for frequent work stoppages.

What is the AL's explanation for today's hartal? Because its two leaders were hurt the whole nation must be made to pay? We condemn the police for their action. But to bring our lives to a standstill for that reason speaks of an opposition that does not seem to care what happens to people who have to earn a living every day unlike the salaried people, or government servants or, not to mention, our politicians.

A new and dangerous intolerance is gripping our politics. A madness of arrogance of power. We say most categorically that the BNP alliance government has not shown even the slightest respect for the opposition. From day one, it has used the full power of the State to brow-beat and cow down the opposition. For every evil under the sun the ruling party had only one answer -- blame the opposition and provide no proof to back its assertion. We said earlier and say it again -- the opposition received 41 percent of the popular vote and ignoring it amounts to ignoring 41 per cent of the voters. This cannot be accepted by our people who have fought so hard and for so long to establish the system of democratic governance. We must remind the BNP and its leaders that as compared with the opposition's tally they got 46 per cent of the votes along with other three allies. So if their 46 per cent gives them legitimacy to rule then AL's 41 per cent entitles them to receive all the respect and dignity of a party that enjoys that many voters' confidence.

Comprehending this simple fact is the first step for getting us out of the dangerous intolerance that is gripping our politics.

Regional partnership in water resources management



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

EFFICIENT and equitable water resources management and provision of safe water supply and sanitation are essential for poverty reduction, ecosystem protection and sustainable growth. We all know about the importance of water in our daily lives. Clean water is essential for human health and survival. Safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygienic practices are preconditions for overall reductions in malnutrition and mortality, specially among children. Access to clean water is critical for sustainable development, including environmental protection and food security.

We need a paradigm shift from current water development approach to water resources management approach to ensure these objectives and to protect the world's precious water resource. We need to work towards Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) which promotes the 'coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems'.

I recall here the remarks made by Jan Pronk in the recently concluded summary of the Conference on "Water for the Poorest", held in November 2003 in Stavanger, Norway. He correctly indicated that 'sound water resources management has become more urgent as water becomes scarcer, its quality declines, environmental and social concerns mount, and the threats posed by floods and droughts are made worse by climate change'.

We are all aware that the South Asian Region shares three common river basins the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. We also know that there is need for

fostering effective and efficient water management in general within South Asia and cooperation and partnership between Nepal and Bangladesh in particular. What we require is regional cooperation and good partnership within the region.

About twenty per cent of the world's population live in South Asia. Of this, nearly 40 per cent live in the region of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) river system. The territory covered is second only to the Amazon in drainage area and

and natural potential have to be creatively and co-operatively harnessed to overcome the region's common problems of overpopulation and poverty, floods, droughts and ecological imbalance.

The water resource potential of the GBM region is available to us in general terms. The three rivers constitute an interconnected system with an annual discharge of 1350 billion cubic meters of water and replenishable ground water resource of 230 billion cubic meters.

also in many areas gone down to alarming levels. This is indirectly putting serious streets on the supply of water for drinking and domestic, municipal, industrial and agricultural uses.

Another factor affecting us is river bank erosion. Large seasonal variations in river flows and the gradual loss of channel depth is causing our banks to erode and river courses to change. Wave action during the high stage is further accelerating the process. This in

In addition to the above causes, in Bangladesh, the magnitude of water quality deterioration has been further compounded by salinity intrusion in the south-western region. We have been suffering since the late seventies with this problem which has arisen as a result of drastic reduction of fresh water flows in the Goari river -- the major distributory of the Ganges. The quotient of health hazard has been further enhanced with the additional problem of relatively high concen-

navigation, industrial and domestic water supply, salinity control and reservoir storage and operation. The anticipated sea level rise in the Bay of Bengal would also significantly compound the problem in Bangladesh through coastal submergence and enhanced drainage congestion in the flood plain.

It is clear that we have a challenging situation that requires cooperation from all countries of the GBM region. The geographically interlinked character of the major rivers warrants and integrated regional approach in the care and management of the catchment. It should be our common essential long terms strategy. We need to derive full and multipurpose utility from the Ganges river. Storage dams need to be implemented which would not only control floods but also yield substantial benefits from the development of hydroelectricity and irrigation facilities. Monsoon storage can also augment dry season flow, improve navigation and help maintain the ecological balance of the region as a whole.

It will be rational to start the development of water resources from Nepal, which is located in the upper reaches of the Ganges in the GBM river system. Such projects will not only cater to the needs of Nepal but may also focus on the vast and growing energy market in North India as well as in Bangladesh. The GMB countries could share the costs and benefits of such multipurpose reservoir projects on agreed terms. An inter-country grid would facilitate the integration of different power systems across the region and allow Nepal to export excess hydropower to India and Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal are co-basins states of the GBM River Basin. There is no reason why the water and land of the zone cannot be developed through cooperation to solve flooding and many other associated problems. An enabling environment can be created in the region with proper political will. This will be of common benefit for the hundreds of millions of people who inhabit this region.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

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volume of discharge. The three river systems stretch across 16 states of India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Tibet region of China.

Despite its poor socioeconomic status, the region is endowed with considerable natural resources that could be used to foster sustainable economic development. Water could be successfully used as the engine to promote this economic development. With reallocation and redistribution of already available resources, much can be accomplished.

Our approach however has to be based on caution. The availability of adequate quantity and appropriate quality of water for various human uses is likely to be an increasingly significant political and social factor in the coming decades. We have to be aware of various aspects that will impact on developments in our region. While we plan and decide on projects related to agriculture, industrial production and power generation, we also have to be particularly sensitive to the question of increased water contamination. Proper water management will be a challenge for the future. We will have to arrange optimum development and management of this vast natural resource for national and regional benefits. We will also have to overcome selfish interests of political boundaries, perceptual differences and legacies of mistrust.

The region's abundant human

Compared to an annual average water availability of 269,000 cubic meters per square kilometre for the world, the availability in the GBM region is 771,400 cubic meters per square kilometre which is nearly three times the world average. While India and Bangladesh share all the three river systems, Nepal shares only the Ganges and Bhutan and China only Brahmaputra.

We are severely handicapped by recurrent floods which cause damage to life, property and infrastructure. The general flooding pattern is similar in all the three countries, characterised by some 80 per cent of annual rainfall occurring in four to five months of monsoon, often concentrated in heavy spells of several days. Bangladesh being the lowest riparian, bears the brunt of flooding in the GBM region.

On the other hand, owing to seasonal variability of water volume in the GBM river systems, the dry season flows of the GBN rivers, particularly of the Ganges, are inadequate to meet the combined needs of the region. In fact, the reduced flow of the Ganges in the dry season has exacerbated the process of northward movement of the salinity front, thereby threatening the environmental health of the region. This process is also affecting water availability in natural water bodies like ponds, beels and rivulets. The ground water table has

turn is leading to channel shifting, creation of new channels during floods and bank slumping due to undercutting. The consequence of such a natural vagary has been displacement of population and further economic marginalisation.

This unfortunate scenario is being further compounded because of the enormous amount of sediment load that is carried from the mountains to the plains. The annual sediment load that passes through our country to the Bay of Bengal varies from 0.5 billion to 1.8 billion tons. A large part of this sediment load is being deposited on the floodplain during bank spilling. The process is gradually changing the valley geometry and floodplain topography. It is also reducing the water conveyance capacity and navigability of the drainage channels.

The water quality in the GBM region is also progressively deteriorating due to increased withdrawals for various uses, leaving insufficient flows for dilution of pollutants during lean periods. The increased use of agro-chemicals and the discharge of untreated domestic sewage and industrial effluents into rivers, have aggravated the problem. Owing to the interaction between different types of surface water, pollution of the entire water resource system has now reached alarming proportions.

tration of arsenic in certain water supply points in the system.

The situation confronting us today is critical. The absence of adequate measures might eventually have an impact of climate change in the entire GBM region. General Circulation Models have revealed that mean annual rainfall in the north-eastern part of the South Asian subcontinent could increase with higher temperatures. The best estimate scenarios for 2030 is that monsoon rainfall could increase by 10 to 15 per cent. It is believed that increased evaporation resulting from higher temperatures in combination with regional changes in precipitation characteristics has the potential to affect mean runoff, frequency and intensity of floods and drought, soil moisture and surface and ground water availability in the GMB countries. It could also increase the rate of melting of snow in the Himalayas and reduce the amount of snowfall if winter is shortened.

In the event of climate change altering the rainfall pattern in the Himalayas, the effect could be felt in the downstream countries. If the monsoon period is shortened, soil moisture deficits in some areas might get worse, while prolonged monsoons might cause frequent flooding and increase inundation depths. In turn, all these will juxtapose and have a substantial effect on agriculture, fishery,

Coming to terms with prospect of demise

MEGASTHENES

STEWART Alsop was the younger of two siblings, both of whom achieved eminence as journalists. The Alsops were distantly related to the Roosevelts; elder brother Joseph and he could probably be described as New Deal Democrats who were also, decades on, more of hawks than doves on Vietnam. Sometime in the late 1960s or possibly early 1970s, Stewart was diagnosed with leukemia. No radical cure existed for the dreaded disease but he did, of course, receive the best possible care. Henry Kissinger himself offered to take his medical records to Moscow during one of his trips there; the then USSR reportedly had made advances in the treatment of this malady. Eventually and inevitably Stewart succumbed to his illness but during a period of remission he wrote a remarkable book, which he called "Stay of Execution". He underscored in the book an obvious if also often overlooked fact, namely that other than birth, death is the only universal experience. The underlying theme of Alsop's book, which he brought out poignantly, was how an individual comes to terms with the prospect of his own imminent passing.

There would seem to be a certain fascination with death, especially so when it touches the high and the mighty, the famous and the infamous, the ranks of celebrity, "the beautiful people" and even the illustrious obscure, that goes beyond the purely morbid. It has been said -- and only half in jest -- that many readers in western countries tend to skim over the sports, comics and obituary pages in a newspaper before moving to serious news and commentaries that are assuredly more exciting on the mind. *The Economist*, in the opinion of many the premier news weekly of the world, invariably

devotes one page of every issue to an obituary.

In our formative years, teachers and well-intentioned elders -- no doubt to both encourage and motivate -- would regale us with tales of two scholars, friends, colleagues and contemporaries who competed and excelled in the same academic discipline -- Physics-Mathematics. They were, of course, Professors Satyen Bose and Meghnad Saha. Two generations later there were similar stories of friendship and competition and also academic excellence and high

barely restrained himself from responding, arguing with his instincts that any protest or argument would only vindicate Prof Robinson! From the Delhi School Sen went on to prestigious academic positions in London, Harvard and then as Master of Trinity. Sukhomoy did his doctoral dissertation with Jan Tinbergen, who incidentally shared with Ragnar Frisch the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics when the award was introduced in 1969. Much of his career was spent at the Delhi School, except for brief stints as

the UN). To many of his admirers and students, and they were legion, he was an "oracle of awesome resonance". Robert Frost wrote and addressed to him a couplet: "From Iron

Tools and Weapons To Ahmed S. Bokhari Nature within her inmost self divides To trouble men with having to take sides."

To Dag Hammarskjold he was a man of the highest culture. Tunisia, in a rare show of honour, named a street after him in Tunis for his forceful advocacy of Tunisian

LIGHTEN UP

An obituary proper is more than an entry in a Who's Who or even a standard CV. It is also an evocation of the times, when the subject lived and achieved whatever it was that entitled him to an obituary, which is written well ahead of time usually and merely updated periodically. When the moment comes for it to be used, only the gaps are filled in.

achievement concerning two other individuals gifted in another discipline -- economic science -- namely Professors Amartya Sen and Sukhomoy Chakravarty. The Delhi School of Economics perhaps scaled new heights of excellence when the likes of Amartya Sen, Sukhomoy Chakravarty and Jagadish Bhagwati adorned its faculty.

Sukhomoy Chakravarty and Amartya Sen were students together at Presidency College. Later Sen went up to Cambridge for higher studies where his tutor was the formidably cerebral Joan Robinson. Many believe to this day that she deserved the Nobel as much as anybody else. At a tutorial class Joan Robinson had once observed somewhat tartly, apropos of something or other, that Indians were too rude, the Japanese too polite but that the Chinese had achieved a right balance. Sen

Visiting Professor abroad and when he served as Member of the Planning Commission. He was also Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council of successive Prime Ministers of India. In August 1990 when Sukhomoy, who had a heart condition, died the *Independent* of London carried an obituary by Amartya Sen. It was less an obituary than a tribute or a celebration, as it were, of the life of a friend and colleague. Not too many future Nobel Laureates, I should think, have written obituaries.

Ahmed Shah Bokhari was versatile and catholic in his talents and achievements. He was successively and successfully an educationist (professor and Principal, Lahore Govt. College), impresario (the first Indian Director General of All India Radio), diplomat (Pakistan's first PR to the UN), and international civil servant (Under Secretary for Public Information at

independence at the UN. When he died suddenly, the *New York Times*, in an extraordinary gesture, mourned his loss editorially as the passing of a "citizen of the world."

Sir N.R. Pillai and S.B. Hatch Barnwell were both of the elite ICS. They would fall in the category of the illustrious obscure. NR had served as Secretary General at the Indian Foreign Office during 1952-60. Years back at a small gathering a former Indian diplomat, who had been his private secretary, reminisced about NR's old world charm, courtliness and imperturbability. She was not certain if he was still alive at that time. He was, and living in London after retirement, as we learned some years later when his lengthy obituary appeared in the *London Times*. Many in Bangladesh would still remember Hatch Barnwell who spent most of his career in the then East Pakistan. He held several important positions,

Times carried an obituary.

It would be a reasonable assumption that to a high proportion of readers of the Times both NR and Hatch Barnwell were unfamiliar names. Perhaps the paper wished simply to underscore a continuity of links between nations at the individual or personal level. An obituary proper is more than an entry in a Who's Who or even a standard CV. It is also an evocation of the times, when the subject lived and achieved whatever it was that entitled him to an obituary, which is written well ahead of time usually and merely updated periodically. When the moment comes for it to be used, only the gaps are filled in.

One time president of Iraq and currently the most famous POW in the world is beyond question Saddam Hussein. Whether or not he passes on eventually due to natural causes, from the business

end of a firing squad or from the gallows, it is a fair assumption, in the present circumstances, that obituarists the world over are updating his obituary, as also those of many others, but with a greater sense of urgency. It will have been recorded that he was for over twenty years the president of Iraq, that he lived by the sword for much of his working life and was a far from exemplary person or leader of people. The less than savoury aspects of his past notwithstanding, he was not always an anathema to the West. Viewers who saw television footage of his capture, his unkempt hair and teeth solicitously being examined presumably for lice and cavities respectively, may well have included the odd obituary writer, and likewise among those who saw still photos showing him being unceremoniously pulled out of his underground hiding place. Some among them may even have been reminded of something that Abraham Lincoln once said as a young man, years before his election as president. In a speech in Springfield in 1839, Lincoln had asserted with absolute assurance: "Many free countries have lost their liberty, and ours may lose hers: but if she shall, be it my proudest plume, not that I was the last to desert, but that I never deserted her".

There is surely precious little in common between the greatest of US presidents and Saddam Hussein. It would thus be a supreme irony, indeed a miracle of sorts, if words uttered by Lincoln in respect of himself were, at any time and by anyone, also to be considered apposite for Saddam, even in a moment of compassion! Would this be part of a planned scenario or simply a coincidence or just one of those things, a consequence of a policy or decision that could not be foreseen? Time will perhaps one day provide the answer.

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

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Do we have a future?

I love my country and believe that we have prospects to become self-sufficient. Life is composed of problems and struggle to solve the problems. So, the national life cannot be an exception. In this stage, our problem is scarcity of basic needs and mismanagement in distribution of materials which satisfy the basic needs.

In order to solve this problem our policy-makers should work hand in hand irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or political ideologies.

Will my dream of a prosperous Bangladesh come true?
Tawhid Shams Chowdhury
English Department, BRAC University

What's going on?

After the Eid-ul-Ajha vacation we met at Dhaka College campus. We were gossiping. Then suddenly a boy, came running to us, saying that there was a dead body hanging on the wall beside the college canteen. We were thundered. We went to the canteen. It was shocking! Really a man, brutally killed, was hanging on the wall. The murderers hung this man on the boundary wall.

What's going on these days in Bangladesh? Isn't there anyone to look after all these? Why there are the police and laws? Why do we go to the educational institutions? To be a criminal? Or to acclimatise with these crimes so that we may later take such crimes very easy? Is there anyone who can answer me?

This is Bangladesh, a third world country that seems to have totally collapsed, three times champion in corruption. Here the lawmakers commit crimes and are alleged godfathers. Police are the 'legal' criminals. They are alleged guard of criminals and murderers, not of the general people. So should I stop searching for the answers to my

questions? Because it's meaningless. However, I think I've found my answer! We have little hope.

UAU
Dhaka College, Dhaka

Effective zakaat system

The present law and order situation of Bangladesh is very grave. During Eid-ul-Azha we have noticed that a number of businessmen were kidnapped and shops were looted. We can also say that the situation is turning worse than ever everyday. I believe n effective zakaat system can bring back some social stability.

What we need is a little help from our able conscious citizens.

The present trend of zakaat system is of no use. Most of the people do not give zakaat, or if they do, they buy a lot of cheap clothes to distribute publicly among the poor to show their social status. Unfortunately this helps neither the poor nor themselves. Instead of distributing lots of cheap clothes if they could buy a CNG autorickshaw, a sewing machine etc. and give it to a poor person, it may save that poor man from choosing the path of crime.

And if this trend continues for four to five years, there will surely be a significant change in the crime rate as more people will be able to earn their livelihood without kidnapping

businessmen or looting jewellery shops. The choice now lies in front of us: either we can share a small amount of our wealth or we lose all our wealth, even lives of our beloved ones in the hands of frustrated people.

Reaz Mohiuddin
Outer circular Road, Dhaka

Advice to our satellite channels

It has really been a great success that we have already three satellite channels in the country. And it would be really good for a developing nation like ours if more satellite channels start working in the coming years. We have noticed that

all of our channels have started showing a particular type of talk show (and the viewers of course enjoy them) where politicians are invited (mostly). So it has been a good opportunity to learn about the different development issues of the country.

But most of the time we find that the politicians blame each other blindly. As a result the talk shows lost its interest. These talk shows can be made very interesting and fruitful if the opponents are invited from the same region of the country, which will really enable us to get a true picture of each and every part of our country.

I would also request all the channels to employ more efficient

and brave interviewers like Shafiq Rehman, who can concentrate on different important issues rather than asking simple and funny questions. These talk shows should be absolutely simple and straightforward. But unfortunately the talk shows do not dare to dig the truth in most of the cases. In order to make these talk shows more attractive and meaningful the above mentioned changes are needed as soon as possible.

Md. Ashiquel Haque
West Hajipara Road, Dhaka