

# Don't live in a make-believe world

Feel the pulse of the people

WE are opposed to hartal as a matter of policy. It is anti-development and anti-democracy. And, contrary to the conventional, or let's say, outdated thinking of the opposition, it is basically anti-people. For, what earns the displeasure of the people has to be characterised as anti-people.

Even so, we took a somewhat liberal view of Thursday's hartal following the government's could-care-less attitude to the opposition demands. But Saturday's dawn-to-dusk hartal, followed by a call for another 12-hour shutdown as being enforced today, only meant how reckless Awami League has become with hartal calls. Three countrywide 12-hour general strikes in five days, two of them reactive to injuries upon three AL leaders, including the Juba League chairman, amounted to punishing the people -- not the government -- as the opposition would like us to believe. If the opposition doesn't eschew hartal as the mainstay of its politics from here on, whatever public sympathy it has earned through the government's dismissive attitude towards it would be lost.

Having said that, we must be equally, if not more, critical of the police repression on the opposition as borne out by the news-photos. Pickets, including women activists, were beaten blue in Dhaka while BNP elements launched a wanton attack on the AL office in Bogra. A huge number of opposition activists were injured and picked up. There have been processions and counter-processions as there were clashes and counter-clashes leading up to physical injuries and damages wreaked on private and public property.

What's alarming -- for the days ahead -- is the incendiary language being used by both sides. The prime minister in a public rally at Jatrabari said those who put a block to her roadmap (for progress) would be 'blocked' inside their houses. The government's heavy-handed policy is reflected by the vow that 'destructive acts' of the opposition would be tried under the Speedy Trial Act. The opposition, on the other hand, has vowed to relentlessly pursue its one-point agenda of toppling the government not waiting for the next electoral verdict. Sheikh Hasina says the BNP-led alliance government's days are numbered.

It is something very strange and somewhat amusing, too that both Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina are claiming exclusive right to public sentiments being in favour of one at the expense of the other. Whatever they are doing they say the public are with them. But they must know what the people really want. They want, let there be no mistaking it, a responsible and constructive opposition and a democratically-run government that has respect for the opposition and gives space to it. In our judgement, both have failed to play their given respective roles. It is time they truly felt the pulse of the people and, for a change, acted accordingly.

## Healthcare missing majority

Intervention badly needed

SPEAKERS at a roundtable on the health sector were unanimous in their opinion that the existing medicare delivery system is far from adequate. The vulnerable sections of society, women and children in particular, are nowhere near getting the healthcare facilities that they need.

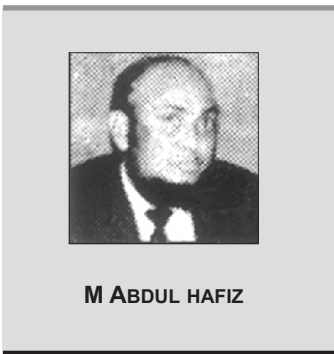
The problems identified at the meeting can be divided broadly into two categories -- structural or logistic limitations and management lacunae. However, it has transpired from the discussion that mismanagement and corruption are by far the biggest obstacle on the way to making the system efficient. To begin with, huge amounts of money have been spent without assessing the healthcare needs of people. The modernisation drive has also failed to attain its objective, as expensive equipment are lying unused in many hospitals. Clearly, the purchase of the equipment was not preceded by sound planning.

Corruption continues to be a debilitating factor. Pilferage accounts for no less than 30 per cent of the drugs procured for patients. The vulnerability of patients is also exploited by the touts who have a strong presence in any public sector hospital these days. Again, the question arises, what is the source of their strength? It is not known why the hospital management cannot knock them out.

The decision to set up community clinics was based on the idea of bringing the health care system as close to the masses as possible. But experience should pretty much convince us that the efficacy of a system does not depend on the physical facilities alone. A clinic cannot function smoothly unless the doctors show a minimum degree of commitment to their profession. Similarly, pilferage of drugs and misappropriation of funds cannot be the stuff of which a dependable healthcare system is made.

Lack of accountability has been identified as the main reason behind the chaotic scene in the health sector. The government must not miss the point that its levers of containing corruption have jammed and also that management of public hospital must improve vastly.

# Dirty bombs, dirtier proliferation



THE scandal originating from the nuclear Shangrilla of Pakistan's Kahuta has indeed shocked and panicked the world once more. It is however not the first time the humanity has been awakened to such an ugly reality; neither will that be the last one. But before that what it's all about. What exactly is AQ Khan affair still reverberating in the air? By his own confession made publicly on television Dr AQ Khan using his position as head of the KRL (Khan Research Laboratory) made clandestine transfer of nuclear technology to countries such as Libya, Iran and North Korea. The confession was the climax of a very intense internal investigation by the government of Pakistan which had been sparked by information received from the outside agencies like IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency).

While the government of

Pakistan couldn't possibly condone the grievous offence the President of Pakistan in recognition of Dr Khan's services to the nation issued a full pardon to him. Even the Americans seemed aware of Pakistan's predicaments and went along with Pakistani line of actions. Yet the flame of fire kindled by the scandal refused to douse and the ballyhoo created over the episode continues to die hard, the alleged nuclear

Few seem to understand that the whole dirty matter is like that and it's made only dirtier by unnecessarily churning those ugly details of 'the episodes'. If what are being now called ugly and labelled immoral or unethical, have to become so after so many such dirty processes had been gone through with as many as nine more nuclear powers proliferating after 1945. And the loopholes are made available in

growth of nuclear arsenal around the world especially in Israel through the most clandestine means while the Big-5, the self-appointed nuclear arbiters, looked the other way. Many experts believe that Israel would one day surprise the world by manufacturing and proliferating some of the deadliest of the weapons. It does not however rest at that.

The way the proliferation has

critically vulnerable in an economically shattered country. The nuclear black market defined as trading of nuclear devices between sub-national groups became alarming and non-stoppable. In an interview the former US armed forces committee chairman Senator Nunn stated: International nuclear smuggling is the primary security challenge not only for the US but the world at least for next 5

threatening bomb only needs between three to twenty-five kilograms of uranium and one kilogram of it occupies only about one-seventh the volume of a standard aluminum soft drink can. The most dangerous isotopes are not very radioactive and are more difficult to detect. There are interesting accounts of non-paid soldiers taking sensitive nuclear materials from the factories without much difficulties. The investigators of many such cases said, "Even potatoes are probably much better guarded today than radioactive materials". In a recent incident a pair of Lithuanian smugglers was apprehended during a sting while attempting to bring nuclear warhead into the US via Miami Airport.

Even the Americans cannot absolve themselves of the charge of proliferating nuclear weapons. A closer examination of Clinton era shows that despite perceived gains made in nuclear arms control the decade of 1990s did see further (vertical) US nuclear proliferation in terms of new weapon designs.

In power relations there is no place for compassion; neither can one afford to show ethics or moral: In a merciless quest for the tools of power one cannot be anything short of modern day Machiavelli.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIS5.

It is now rather fashionable in the west to denounce countries like Pakistan for the nuclear leakages to the so-called 'rogue states' -- totally ignoring the fact that the advanced countries, the arms dealers and mafia operatives in the Western societies are virtually responsible for proliferation effort. The atomic era has been witness to the growth of nuclear arsenal around the world especially in Israel through the most clandestine means while the Big-5, the self-appointed nuclear arbiters, looked the other way.

proliferation by Dr AQ Khan has in the meantime taken its toll and created unnecessary phobia about a highly insecure future by concocting bewildering variety of speculations and through the desperate search of a scapegoat. While AQ Khan's confession has indeed been heart-aching for his countrymen, the sad behaviour of those who take this internationally dangerous situation as a God-gifted pie of opportunity deserve universal condemnation.

umpteen numbers of sanctions, checks, inspections, restrictions and treaties.

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been taking place in Russia, world's second largest nuclear power, is indeed ominous. According to the US intelligence there are over 950 sites in the former Soviet Union that are contaminated with weapon-grade nuclear materials. Nearly each one of the locations has absolutely no security or logging system enabling them to track the inventories.

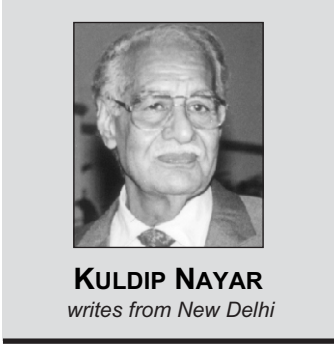
After the collapse of Soviet Union its nuclear arsenal became

to 10 years, perhaps longer.

Much like the illicit drug trade, authorities are only able to stop an estimated 40 per cent of the nuclear trafficking. 'Instances of confiscated nuclear weapon from former Soviet Union countries in 1994 doubled to 124 from the previous year. This means there is an enormous amount of radioactive material that is being transported to all four corners of the globe.

It is estimated that a legitimately

# The gun that misfired



KULDEEP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

THERE was practically no discussion on Bofors gun kickbacks in the 13<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha which has been dissolved for early elections. Once Rajiv Gandhi died -- the main target -- the non-Congress parties lost interest in the scam. Whether he was involved or not had continued to be at the back of people's mind, even after his name was dropped from the charge sheet. By pronouncing that there was no evidence against him for having accepted money, the Delhi High Court has ended the debate in one way. But it has taken 16 long years.

Rajiv Gandhi's widow and Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, is justified in her complaint that her family, including the one in Italy, faced a campaign of vilification for years. But she is ill advised to make it a poll issue. The first set of advertisements the Congress has released suggests that Rajiv Gandhi's exoneration may be the party's plank at the polls. The advertisement displaying Rajiv Gandhi's picture is captioned: Let those who inflicted intolerable mental agony on his family hang their heads in shame. Who are they? Sonia Gandhi does not have to look far. Most of them are the Congress allies in the coming

elections. How does the party serve its interest by telling Rashtriya Janata Dal president Laloo Yadav, Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh, Lok Janshakti leader Ram Vilas Paswan or DMK chief M Karunanidhi to "hang their heads in shame"?

V. P. Singh, Sonia Gandhi's strong supporter, won around 90 seats in the 1989 Lok Sabha polls by making Bofors synonymous with corruption. I

scandal have not given a clean chit to Rajiv Gandhi. The feel-good factor in the party should stay at that level, not beyond.

That there was no evidence against Rajiv Gandhi was known for a long time. For different reasons, the successive governments prolonged the case: the non-Congress ones because they were keen to get at Rajiv Gandhi and the Narasimha Rao government because it wanted to make sure

interview, he told me that the inquiry was going on but Rajiv Gandhi's name was not there. The evidence collected was weak for a court case. Vajpayee has proved to be correct. However, the reply at that time surprised me because the general impression was that the centre had dragged its feet purposely. The BJP was particularly suspect because its leaders were close to a foreign-based business house,

how long -- if all that were translated into money, it would run into crores of rupees. Why the agency failed to locate the recipients is a matter for some high-power inquiry. Was the failure due to political reasons? Why was Quattrochi, an Italian who supposedly received part of the kickbacks, allowed to leave India?

One should, however, admit that there was a lot of political interference in what the CBI

hawala bounty on the basis of disproportionate wealth if the other evidence was not forthcoming.

The failure of the CBI, as is apparent from the Bofors scandal and the hawala case, does not mean that it is the end of the matter. The government has to meet the demand for justice. Had the working of the agency been transparent, things wouldn't have come to such a pass. The Shah Commission, which went into the misdeeds of the emergency (1975-77), had suggested openness in the working of the CBI. But no government has even considered the proposal. Unfortunately, corruption has ceased to be news in India. It is one of those things which India cannot live with but knows no way to live without. These past few years of the Vajpayee government have been periods of scams and scandals: political chicanery, diary entries and defence deal kickbacks. Leaving aside two or three state chief ministers, the rest had their fingers in the till.

Yet, if the nation has to retrieve the values, a clean society is a must. There have to be exposures and loud public protests. The attitude of resignation does not help. A people's protest needs to be built, not by political parties because of their own involvement, but by those who are outside the system and still enjoy credibility.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

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recall travelling through Rajasthan during the polls. The Congress lost all the 26 Lok Sabha seats in the state. V.P Singh has said in a TV interview that he felt relieved after Rajiv Gandhi's exoneration. This is the least he could have said because he was the first to drag Rajiv Gandhi through the mud.

The BJP and its partners in the NDA have been no less savage on Rajiv Gandhi's "involvement." Their decision to join issue with the Congress, as the statement by party president Venkaiah Naidu indicates, may be counter-productive. They have no argument left to drive home after the exoneration. Yet, the Congress itself should realise that once it resurrects Rajiv Gandhi, many skeletons may tumble out from nowhere. Some officials who have disclosed the details about the

that nothing untoward came out against Rajiv Gandhi.

Soon after I joined parliament in 1997, I wrote to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee over the inordinate delay in knowing the name of recipients when the fact of kickbacks had been established. His reply was that "the matter is receiving due attention and all necessary steps will be taken to see the matter to its logical end." It was a typically bureaucratic reply.

What I wanted to know was whether the NDA's promise to take action in the Bofors case "within one month" held good. He denied that. He said: "While the importance of the matter cannot be overemphasised, I may point that the national agenda for governance which guided principles and policies of the government does not include any such specific time frame." Subsequently, in an

said to be one of the recipients of kickbacks. Even though all the noise about the case has more or less ended in a whimper, political parties have hurt themselves in the process. The much-vaunted Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), however, comes out the worst. True, the CBI goes in appeal before the Supreme Court. Still its sterile effort over such a long period is black mark against it.

Understandably, the Delhi High Court has been savage in its remark: "Sixteen long years of investigation by the premier agency of the country could not unearth a scintilla of evidence against them (Rajiv Gandhi and late Defence Secretary S K Bhatnagar) for having accepted bribe/illegal gratification in awarding the contact in favour of Bofors."

How many officials visited how many countries and for

was doing. The inquiry was diluted in 1992, two years after the case was registered, when K Madhavan and M.D. Sharma, the two officers pursuing the case doggedly were transferred without any explanation. One CBI top brass said at that time that he had his doubts about the outcome "in the face of the transfers of the two officers and repeated message from political bosses to hush up everything."

The lack of evidence -- the point underlined in the judgement -- was also the reason why the hawala case against Home Minister L.K. Advani and a few others collapsed in a Delhi court. The names entered in the diary seized required some corroboration. The CBI failed to provide one. In fact, the Supreme Court took the agency to task for not having moved against the recipients of

## OPINION

# Fundamental deficiencies in our democracy

SULAV BARUA

WHETHER democracy is the best medium to run a state is a questionable topic nowadays, no other alternative doctrine has been considered as being a good alternative method to rule the state. Leaving aside various sorts of arguments of sage figures, we can conclude that only a democracy can give us guarantee of a smooth progression of a country going beyond its various limitations and impediments. Bangladesh, an LDC, is being ruled under the democratic principles, though it is true that its development process was hindered many times due to autocratic rule. But, after the dethronement of the then president Ershad in the face of a mass movement, we have registered a growing faith in democracy. In three elections, after the departure of autocratic regime, we saw the two largest and mainstream political parties namely, the Awami League and the BNP, coming to

power. It indicates our commitment to the system of democracy and this loyalty must yield a stability in our stirring and agile political ambience. But, a transformation to a fully democratic country from a country under military rule is an arduous process. The following points must be considered.

The separation of judiciary: Segregation of the judiciary from the executive body of the state has been recognised as the most important issue in a democratic polity as this process guarantees an equal justice to be delivered to the people forgetting their colour, status, financial or administrative influence. Retaining control over an independent judiciary under a democratic structure means the arbitration process is clearly influenced by the power of administrative branch and thus the true justice system is impeded. Specially, the lower branch of the judiciary is affected directly by this trend. In Bangladesh, the lower branch of the judiciary namely, Magistrate

court, has been under grip of the government for long and that is why it is highly questionable how effective this offshoot of judicial institution is in terms of giving off proper judgement. We have registered in past that whenever a government gets changed, a huge number of known criminals get bail while members of the opposition are locked up without any definite proof being submitted or shown by the authorities concerned. This trend is completely alien to the democratic characteristics and an ominous sign of how democratic norms are getting destroyed little by little.

An institution of Ombudsman: As we hear governmental

influence over the arbitration process by the lower branch of the judiciary, from time to time, could be lessened dramatically, if and only if we had an institution of Ombudsman. This is such an institution, which having an independent status, can investigate into any case, record the flaws, make the reports public or even present it before the court without having to be answerable to the government for its action. Most importantly, this institution holds the right to take the government to the court for any known or unknown wrong-doings. But, an absence of this crucial structure in a state influences the government not to hesitate to

commit misdeeds. The governments of Bangladesh have been able to avoid law in many cases in spite of committing plenty of wrong-doings only because they were not answerable to any institution. The index which shows an increasing graph regarding our practice of corruption is the direct output of that absence of the said legal structure. Having an ombudsman could provide an opportunity to look into the sensitive cases like Udichi bombing, recovery of ammunition, bombing at Hazrat Shahjalal Mosque etc.

Human rights commission: Preservation and protection of human rights are now high on the

agenda of governments across the globe. From Asia to Africa, America to Europe, everywhere in the world, it is a burning issue. In developing countries like Bangladesh, this is far more important than any other issue as the powerful muscle of the state always endeavours to fool the common people in various ways and thus keep them deprived of getting the opportunities they deserve to have. Not only this, they are kept apart to get hold of the other rights from the state by some misapplication of laws, machination, threat or consternation. The credentials of our country in this respect often come under international

scrutiny. In this critical juncture, a human rights commission could have been very effective in setting our records straight. Most importantly, it is the essential part of a democratic culture.

Democratic political ambience: In democracy, a democratic atmosphere in practicing politics is a dire necessity. But, if you keep an analysing eye on our political scenario, what you would probably find out is nothing but political acrimony. Bill Richardson, an influential figure during the regime of president Bill Clinton, once said while visiting Bangladesh that the country should get rid of the political acrimony to ensure a total and pluralistic democracy. But, to our utter dismay, we have noticed that our politicians have not paid any attention to this area, rather, they have set their sights on developing acrimonious and hostile relationship. In such an atmosphere, a nascent democracy, as we call it, cannot thrive. I don't know of any example of any

country save Bangladesh in the world where the interests of the country has fallen behind the task of establishing party ideology.

Impartial and independent media -- Winner of noble prize for welfare economy, Amartya Sen has given this field an "urgent status" to ensure a democratic polity.

Maybe, our country is ridden with various problems and crises, but we have a very good potential to thrive as a true democratic state. Our two parties dominate the political arena, we have a strong cultural base, a potential economic platform and, above all, an industrious population, which speak volumes for the development potential.

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