

Blame-game in the House

Opposition denied space again!

DASHING our hopes that the current JS session would see some constructive debates on important national issues, it degenerated into a big pandemonium on Wednesday, following the Speaker's rejection of the AL adjournment motion seeking discussion on the August 21 blasts.

The AL lawmakers vehemently protested the ruling which left the August 21 incident -- a matter of grave concern not only to the party but the nation as well undebated with the importance it deserved. The AL lawmakers felt, for understandable psychological reasons, that they had been pushed on to the edge. We are at a loss to understand why a detailed discussion on the burning issue was not allowed under rule 62. The Speaker stated that a discussion on an adjournment motion could have influenced the investigation into the blasts. If that be the case, then how he could permit the same debate under the general discussion?

The end-result was far from desirable. The ruling alliance, whose job was to remove the irritants that the opposition perceives as insurmountable obstacles on their way to joining the JS, have only managed to make things worse. Despite all that has been said and written, there has been no noticeable change in the mindset of the Treasury Bench. The opposition has once more been denied the space that it needs to play its due role. How else could one explain the fact that a discussion on an important issue was not permitted on a very narrow interpretation of rules of procedure.

The JS is the platform for clarifying issues of public concern, and not for blurring them. Controversies have arisen over the August 21 grenade attack, and an all party discussion on the issue could only serve the cause of rule of law better.

Water talks inch forward

Need for solution should override technicalities

THE joint expert committee (JCE) headed by water resources secretaries of India and Bangladesh has concluded its Dhaka session on a shared note of optimism. Whether their positive, if not quite an upbeat mood, is well-founded, only the next JCE meeting scheduled for December in New Delhi to grapple with the substantive issues can tell.

The talks have not produced any instant result, nor were they indeed expected to, by any magic wand. You do not arrive at agreed modalities of sharing waters of the Teesta and six other common rivers by virtue of just one round of talks. Let's not forget, this was just an expert level meeting, not a JRC meet as such of two water resources ministers having any decision-making power to take matters up to the highest political level for a final accord.

As things are envisaged at this point, the joint technical group (JTG) will submit a report within three months helping to narrow down differences on Teesta water sharing between the two sides. Their views differ on the quantum of water to be retained for maintaining the flow of the river in the lean season and the apportionment of the remaining available water to India and Bangladesh. The latter's concern arises from the fact that the flow has declined by 1000 cusecs much to the detriment of ecological balance in Bangladesh. The interim water sharing agreement on Teesta dating back to 1983, in the absence of a renewal, has left a one-sided option open to India. That's why the circumstances are pressing for Bangladesh to get an accord on this common river.

An agreement on Teesta water sharing is important for one very cogent reason. It will set a precedent for the sharing of water of six other common rivers -- Dhrar, Duhukumar, Monu, Khawai, Gunti and Muhuri.

When the structure for negotiations is many-layered comprising joint technical group, the joint expert committee at the secretaries' level and the JRC headed by the water resources ministers of two countries, there is scope for procrastination. That's what needs to be avoided, because the JCE has been trying to grapple with the technical problems for the last seven years, evidently without hitting a common ground as yet.

This is despite the fact that the Ganges water sharing accord contained a commitment to resolve the water sharing problems pertaining to other common rivers on the same principle as that of the historic agreement.

Bangladesh and the UN

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE first port of call of all decolonised nations was usually the United Nations, seeking its membership that gave these countries legitimacy as members of the international community and also assurances of security and territorial inviolability from possible attack by predatory states. The independence wave in the years following the Second World War, the second according to Samuel Huntington and Larry Diamond -- the first wave being those gaining independence after the First World War and the third wave being those democracies achieved following the dissolution of Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union -- was one of the inevitable consequences of the war as it was fought in the name of occupied humanity who had to be freed.

Some concerns were, however, expressed as to the suitability of giving independence to some of the colonies on the ground they might not have either the societal values or the institutions necessary for the successful functioning of an independent state. In any case the Dumbarton Oaks Conference (1944) and the subsequent San Francisco Conference (1945) deliberated on the formation of a new international order based on universal respect for human rights. During the deliberations, the Soviet proposal for a reference to the right of self-determination of peoples, initially opposed by the US, UK, and France, was subsequently included in the Charter.

Perhaps the most important assertion in favour of decolonisation was the UNGA resolution of December 1960 which proclaimed "the necessity of bringing to speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations because the subjection of peoples to alien subjection, domination and exploitation was a denial of human rights, contrary to UN Charter and an impediment to international peace and development." This overwhelming moral demand on colonisers to free people from domination was generally heeded, and consequently the membership of the UN grew at exponential rate.

In the case of Bangladesh, which was not a colony of a foreign power in the traditional sense, and whose independence was gained through a bloody war of liberation, her relation-

ship with the United Nations was forged in steel long before the country formally became a member of the UN. The story of her caesarian birth has been told in countless books. One outstanding account of our fight for freedom in the corridors and chambers of the United Nations has been detailed by Indian National Security Advisor J.N. Dixit in his book *Liberation and Beyond*. Dixit's account was revealing, as he was an individual taking active part in and becoming proximate witness to the momentous and historical events surrounding the independence of Bangladesh.

He described how despite Indian Foreign Minister Sardar Swaran Singh's spirited advocacy of the East Pakistan crisis (in Sept-Oct 1971) in the UNGA, seeking UN support, most of the countries did not recognise the political aspect of the crisis

The International Commission of Jurists set up in 1972 to investigate the events of East Pakistan found that by 1970 the population of East Pakistan had constituted a separate "people." The admission of Bangladesh into the UN as a sovereign and independent state, wrote Thomas Musgrave, constituted implicit recognition by the UNGA that the Bengalis were a people since only a people could freely determine their own political status. Besides, international law recognises a continuum of remedies ranging from protection of individuals to minority rights ending with secession as the ultimate remedy. At a certain point, the severity of a state's treatment of its minority becomes a matter of international concern. This concern may finally involve an international legitimisation of a right of secessionist self-determination (Lee Buehheit-

responsible member. Twice Bangladesh was elected as a non-permanent member of the UNSC that reflected the growing confidence of the international community in Bangladesh, in that the country has come a long way from Henry Kissinger's description of Bangladesh as an "international basket case." Like all small nations, Bangladesh wants a world based on the rule of law, partly because it lacks the military and economic might to withstand Hobbesian state of nature where there is continual fear of danger and violent death and partly because of the country's aspiration to be counted as one in which the rule of law prevails. The fear of possible encroachment on her sovereignty, an encroachment not based on international law derived from global morality drawing force from solidarist approach of declara-

tive, and credible role for the UN in Iraq's transition to democracy and in the country's reconstruction. Understandably Bangladesh, dependent as it is on US munificence for its well-being, cannot afford to be overly critical of American muscularity. But Bangladesh's hesitation to send troops to Iraq unless they are under UN command, given Bangladesh's impressive record of participating in 25 out of 53 UN peace keeping missions and now serving in 10 out of 16 on-going missions (additionally providing force commanders for UN peace keeping force in Mozambique and Georgia) should be read as the country's expression of unhappiness over the Anglo-US misadventure in Iraq.

Bangladesh's activism along with other members had resulted in the UNGA declaration of the year 2000

Bangladesh's robust participation in many UN peacekeeping operations testifies to the country's unshakable faith in the UN Charter. Bangladesh strongly supports Kofi Annan's call for strengthening the multilateral institutions and the principal organs of the UN through effective reforms representative of the aspirations and concerns of the member states, reforms not perpetuating current global imbalances and responding only to transitory phases. It is unclear, however, whether Bangladesh favours India's inclusion as a permanent member of the UNSC in line with some developed countries' support to Indian aspiration and G-8's consideration to expand the club into G-10 by including China and India. Such international affirmation of Indian economic and diplomatic ascent as an important player in global affairs is now being lost in the incestuous nature of regional conflict.

It is also debatable how wise it is to raise bilateral issues, however obliquely, in the UN forum before all avenues for their settlement have been exhausted between the contestants. Bangladesh may wish to avoid following Pakistani example of sabre rattling, as such a policy would be counterproductive, and direct her energy on improving her negotiating skills, knowledge of issues to encyclopaedic level, and mastery of diplomatic skills to irreproachable state. Only then can a country like Bangladesh, living at the edge of global society, effectively reclaim its position due to a country endowed with potentially rich human resources. In the ultimate analysis a resource-poor LDC like Bangladesh, dependent as it is on increased foreign assistance and investment, unhindered market access and preferential treatment of its exportables; trapped in the vortex of poverty, lacking a knowledge-based society, pregnant with incipient domestic terrorism, cannot but opt for an international community whose domestic and international behaviour will be subordinate to international law and civilised code of conduct. In pursuit of these goals there cannot be any other organisation more suitable than the United Nations.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former secretary and ambassador.

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and support the liberation struggle and the consequent fragmentation of Pakistan. These countries were willing to recognise the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. Even during the dying days of Pakistan on the eastern front, wrote Dixit, the US, Britain and France in the UNSC "urged an immediate cease fire and resumption of political dialogue. None of these members addressed the basic cause of the crisis, namely, the non-fulfilment of the legitimate political verdict given by the people of Bangladesh."

Bangladesh owes a debt of gratitude to the former Soviet Union, among others, because had it not been for the Soviet veto (cast seven times in our favour in December 1971) President Nixon's pro-Pakistani tilt would have found expression in the UNSC aborting our freedom struggle. But the surrender of the Pakistani occupation army did not automatically grant Bangladesh UN membership. The legal hurdle of the right of secession only by a "people" and not by an "ethnic group" had to be overcome.

Secession 1978.

This is known as the "oppression theory" which was used to justify the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan. The recognition of Bangladesh as an independent country by the UN gave validity to the "oppression theory" as a basis for secession. But then Bangladesh could very well have been a rare case at that time if one were to look back at Biafra that failed to get international support due to the insistence by the African orthodoxy that only former colonies were entitled to be sovereign and independent states. Later, however, different formulas had to be set by the EU and the US for recognition of newly independent states following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, as well as on the occasion of peaceful separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

After meeting the political and legal criteria set by the international community on September 17, 1974 Bangladesh took its seat as a member of the UN and has since then met the obligations expected of a

country law, but based on perceived "aggressor's" selfish interests, could have played an important role in the foreign and defence policy of Bangladesh and her inflexible faith in the UN Charter and the UN system.

Bangladesh is acutely aware of the global turmoil resulting from presumption and unilateral action as an option for security, targeting Islamic radicalism and its fall out of religious profiling. Bangladesh discounts any possibility of the UN becoming irrelevant because of its universality; inability of any one state to meet the intricate and interlocking economic, monetary, financial, and trade related problems arising out of globalisation; and no less importantly as the legitimacy of the UN is founded on the principles of international law. Bangladesh regrets the slow progress in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals and "unacceptable and unconscionable" decline in aid flow to least developed countries.

On Iraq, Bangladesh's policy appears to advocate a clear, effec-

as the International Year of the Culture of Peace. Bangladesh Presidency of the Security Council of March 2000 saw explosive situations in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Congo, Somalia, Tajikistan and Western Sahara as the main pre-occupation of the UNSC. Bangladesh is equally engaged in the fight against deteriorating economic situation in the least developed countries who to escape from the poverty trap has to achieve a 7 percent growth rate which suggests an increase in the ratio of investment to GDP by 25 percent, an impossible target to achieve without considerable foreign investment. But then it is unrealistic to expect appreciable amount of foreign investment to flow into Bangladesh under the existing situation that is not investment friendly.

So far as the United Nations is concerned, Bangladesh remains convinced of its indispensability as the central organ for collective management for global affairs.

We want a brave new country



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HERE are almost 400 listed dailies in Bangladesh and a few more are going to be published soon. Magazines are mushrooming as well, neck to neck with their diurnal cousins. Then we have 3 private television channels, at least an equal number of them in the pipeline already. Private universities are a dime a dozen and fly-night venture capitalists swarm the country. Scan the walls and skylines of the city, posters and billboards announce new male or female singers every week. Almost everybody is writing books these days, and restaurants open as if one day. Add up all of these and tell me what you think. Don't we have a fantastic country of thinking, talking, writing, eating, working and singing people, busting with activities?

Think about the energy that goes into these activities and the emotional jet fuel that burns to keep that energy level going. Everyone is trying to do something, trying to become a writer, editor, singer, thinker, banker, or investor. And these do not include the teeming millions out there who are working in the fields and factories, pulling rickshaws, drawing carts, washing dishes, and cooking at home. Throw in the energy that goes into

politics, in the processions, meetings and regular initiatives. We have a great country indeed, flowing with the steam and sweat of enterprising people.

But where are we going with it? We have got corruption, chaos and conflict, all subsumed within the prospect of a future that hangs over us like a pall of gloom. Where are we heading with so much energy? Everyone is thinking, everyone is writing, singing, talking and initiating, yet we are not moving. We have got more chiefs than Indians, more leaders than followers, more singers

than listeners, more newspapers than readers, more banks than customers, more TV channels (including satellite TVs) than time to watch, and more mouths than words. The list can go on and on.

We are hooked on quantity more than quality. We want to possess even though we cannot profess. We want to have corruption, chaos and conflict, all subsumed within the prospect of a future that hangs over us like a pall of gloom. Where are we heading with so much energy? Everyone is thinking, everyone is writing, singing, talking and initiating, yet we are not moving. We have got more chiefs than Indians, more leaders than followers, more singers

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achieved a position in life to dispense what he could not get when he was growing up. He floats and gloats in his success, a legend in his own mind, caught tightly in the satisfaction of his glory like a madman living in his straightjacket.

This is where the great energy of our country gets dissipated, wasted like fuel leakage, perhaps a system loss that is fraying away our hope for the future. It can be compared with the governance of a river, which needs to flow, but it also needs to flow between its two banks, failing which rising water level and strong current overflows and floods the villages. That is exactly what has been happening to us, every time a newspaper comes out, a new TV channel opens, a new book is published or a new poster

example, if you can create a cycle that allows you to set off explosions like this, hundreds of times per minute, and if you can harness that energy in a useful way, what you have is the core of a car engine!

We have so much energy to propel ourselves to great heights as individuals, but somehow we are collectively unable to create a sustainable cycle that allows us to set off explosions ad continuum. The writer writes because he wants to be published. The singer sings because he likes to have an album. The politician talks because he wishes to return to power. The eating man eats because he wants to satisfy his palate. The thinking man thinks because he would like to have a piece of the pie. The working man

but does not kick the engine. This country is a churning sea in stagnation, much ado about nothing, a great example of how things can be full of sound and fury yet signify nothing.

Our nation is a ringing contradiction like the sound of silence. Everybody talks, nobody listens. Everybody seeks, nobody finds. Everybody looks, nobody sees. Everybody pretends, nobody intends. Everybody owns, nobody shares. Everybody commits, nobody cares. Eric Fromm in *Escape from Freedom* defines power as the capacity to inflict unlimited pain and suffering to another human being. Indeed we have escaped from freedom in an independent country as we have gained tremendous capacity to inflict

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On the top of everything and most pitifully, the provocative remarks of some ministers of the government made things all the more agonising. Added to all these the unbridled words of some of the lesser party zealots, as usual blaming Awami League for the catastrophe have made the issue of proper investigation with desired transparency more complex and dubious.

Awami League has, in the meantime, rejected government's effort at getting the incident investigated by Interpol and FBI -- both under international pressure. The argument proffered for such rejection is the association of the same men of the law enforcing agencies who failed miserably to protect the unsuspecting audience in the meeting and to haul up the culprits -- if not all, at least a few of those animals. It was justifiably feared that these men would do anything to mislead the foreign investigators. Awami League has instead asked for UN or Commonwealth sponsored impartial

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Yet truth will be upheld in course of time. Repeated adherence to blatant lies on such bomb blasts in the past three years seeking implication of Awami League members had been unfounded. This time too such attempt may be proved false and preposterous. Those who are used to indulge in such dirty manoeuvre on the wings of lies may soon start paying for it when the wrath of the people would take them to task. The whole nation perhaps awaits the inevitable sweep of the tempest. Those blighters must be punished and their anti-democracy, anti-liberation linkage must be quashed by any means.

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OPINION

Six days to twenty-first

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

AUGUST 15, 1975 and August 21, 2004 -- the first represents the residence of the great leader and the other, a public thoroughfare named after him. Both are nevertheless synonymous with a legend, the greatest Bangalee ever born -- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman. Going by the calendar the tragic episodes enacted by the blood thirsty hounds of human beings are 29 years apart. But by metaphoric description it is only six days between the two. The strategy was very much identical -- closing the account, vis-a-vis, extermination of the residual part of the family where Sheikh Hasina was the ultimate target, the penultimate being Sheikh Rehana.

The grim, diabolic, dastardly act of massacre on August 21, 2004 at Bangabandhu Avenue meeting of Awami League appeared to have been the result of a flawless plan. It was very clear that Sheikh Hasina and all other leaders of the party on the makeshift dais on truck were targets en bloc of the assassins. The

expected norms of humanity was reported, in some dailies, to have been outrageously partisan. A heart rending scene of human miseries was shown on TV belonging to the private sector. The wounded men and women were found screaming in palpably terrific pains from the wounds. Their escorts running back and forth helplessly for medical help, for doctor and nurses. Some were crying for blood for the grievously wounded. A hellish pandemonium seized the entire medical college hospital.

Amidst such state of uncertainty a reporter at site of a vernacular daily heard some whispers among some doctors and nurses on duty in that nightmarish evening. Visible spectres of fear were reported to have been large writ on their countenance. They dared not taking immediate care of the dying, seriously hit by grenades. Some of the medics and nurses left the place hurriedly to avoid, reportedly, political intervention of one relatively senior doctor looking after his party's interest in DMCH at the command of a formida-

ble high-up. It was also alleged that due to this doctor's attitudinal composure many of the patients were readily removed by their relatives, friends and human escorts to other hospitals and clinics taking great risks of their (the wounded) lives. A disgraceful and condemnable lack of spontaneous cooperation and assistance from some of the doctors and DMC administration was also reported in some newspapers. Giving credence to such obtrusive reports is again a tremendously hard task on the part of any human being worth