

Throttling democratic

FROM PAGE 1
When the AL, in its second term in opposition, started calling hartals we resumed our condemnation of it. We wrote volumes in trying to persuade the opposition not to adopt this anti-civil rights and economy-destroying method of mass protest. To their credit the AL and other opposition parties sensed a growing public resentment against hartals. Over time its acceptability became less and less and we saw a desire among our politicians, however tenuous, to desist from calling hartals.

There was also the issue of boycott of parliament. Again, both the BNP and AL are equally guilty of indulging in this democracy-destroying habit and once again, the media, by and large, has been extremely proactive in building up public opinion against it. Here again we noticed a heartening development when the AL changed its boycott decision and returned to parliament and decided to participate in the activities of all its standing committees.

We recall here Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's own repeated public speeches that urged the AL to return to parliament. She promised the opposition full freedom to discuss any subject of their choice with as much time as they would desire. We welcomed the PM's pronouncements and complimented her for giving the right political signals for some sort of reconciliation in the volatile political situation.

The assassination attempt on Sheikh Hasina on August 21 shook the nation to its very core. The death of 20 political activists including AL's senior leader Ivy Rahman and the injury of more than 200 AL activists stunned the nation and the whole world, prompting an outpouring of sympathy from world leaders that Bangladesh had not received for a long time. The world stood by us at this moment of trial and offered a helping hand to get us out of this dangerous situation. What the world did not know is that our politics had become so rotten that no amount of people's suffering (first the floods and then a rain-induced one) and no amount of weakening of our democratic base will stop them from indulging in the vicious, acrimonious and self-destructive politics that we have been seeing for the last 13 years.

The new mischief was set off by the JCD, the student wing of the BNP, that started propagating in the campuses around the country, within 24 hours of the tragedy, that the events of August 21 were AL's own doing. The response from Sheikh Hasina was to blame the PM for the incident and hold the ruling coalition responsible for terrorism in the country. The battle of lies that followed gradually smothered all rational public discourse on the subject, much to the glee of the terrorists and the alarm of common citizens and the international community.

Given our political culture some element of blame game was expected at the party level. But what we did not expect and cannot accept is the role the government is playing. Everybody in the government including, most regrettably, the PM appears to have forgotten that the government belongs to the nation and not only to the BNP and its coalition partners. Those who

belong to and support the Awami League are also her concern and responsibility. A crime of the most grievous nature has been committed at the very heart of the capital. It was not an accident but a well-planned terrorist attack on a peaceful rally of the biggest opposition party in our country. The person who was our Prime Minister just three years ago and who is the shadow PM today was nearly killed. To literally make a mockery of the whole event by stating from the highest levels of the government that it was AL's ploy to destabilise the country is not only to allow a convenient cover to the real perpetrators of this dastardly crime but also to, in fact, tell them that no accusing finger will be pointed at them regardless of what they did. It does not need a genius to conclude that such actions by any government may encourage further destabilising events.

The Prime Minister would do well to realise that she has a people to lead and not just a 'quarter' to blame. Ivy Rahman and the other 19 who died may have been Awami Leaguers. But they were also citizens of Bangladesh and it is the duty of the government to hunt down their killers and protect the rest who want to work to build our country and even those who may want to voice peaceful dissent.

The language of our politics is only that of threats and counter-threats. Haven't we heard them for the last 13 years of our democracy? Have threats worked? Did the BNP get cowed-down by the AL oppression when it was in the opposition? If the harshest of Sheikh Hasina's police brutality did not cow the opposition BNP, then how can the BNP think that the AL will be brutalised into submission now? It did not work in the past and it will not work now. Only that more violence will be generated and the terrorists will use the political fight between the two leading parties to implement their agenda of harming our democracy.

We recount briefly the past only to state the obvious. That unless the opposition is given democratic space they will be forced to resort to the undemocratic options like hartals. When we wrote that the opposition should shun hartals and the boycott of parliament we naturally assumed that they would be given their due space both inside parliament and out on the streets (for peaceful rallies). We think the opposition's 50-km-long 'Human Wall' was indeed very innovative, praiseworthy and an effective method of expressing dissent. Its scheduled grand rally on October 3, instead of yet another hartal, is again a praiseworthy effort.

Conventional wisdom is that motorists approaching each other from opposite directions must dim their lights to see the road ahead. If both put on their beam (headlights) the glare blinds both and a head-on clash becomes inevitable. Our two leaders only glare when they look, only make threats when they speak, and only issue ultimatums when they communicate. It is possible that they will stop the glare and try to see the road ahead? We live with that hope.

Bribes eat away 3pc

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the climate for firms in Dhaka matched that of Shanghai, Dhaka could reduce its productivity gap by 40 percent and wages could rise by 18 percent.

For Kolkata, the effect is even larger, the surveys find citing that 80 percent of the productivity gap could be closed and wages could rise by 38 percent.

"A good investment climate is central to growth and poverty reduction," said François Bourguignon, World Bank's senior vice-president and chief economist.

The World Bank report said improving property rights in China launched a process that lifted 400 million people out of poverty.

According to the surveys, over 40 percent of South Asian firms rank electricity as major constraint to operation and growth of their business compared to less than 10 percent in Eastern Europe and less than 25 percent in Latin America and East Asia.

Losses from electricity outages average over 10 percent of sales in India and over 6.5 percent in Pakistan. Sixty-three percent of the respondent firms in Pakistan lack confidence that courts will uphold their property rights.

"Unreliable electricity supply and other infrastructure, crime and corruption can impose costs that are more than double those of regulation. Together with weak contract enforcement and onerous regulation, these costs can amount to over 25 percent of sales - or more than three times what firms typically pay in taxes," the WB report says.

The development report finds that registering a business takes 35 days in Bangladesh which is 24 days in Pakistan, 50 days in Sri Lanka and 89 days in India.

Resolving a bankruptcy requires 3.2 years on average across the world while South Asia's average is 4.8 percent and India's 10 years, it says.

According to 'Doing Business Database' of the report, India's reforms increased growth from 2.9

percent a year in the 1970s to 6.7 percent by the mid-1990s and the share of its population below \$1 a day fell from 54 percent in 1980 to 35 percent in 2000.

"Perfection is not required to realise these gains (in India). The key is to address important constraints in ways that give firms confidence to invest and to follow initial reforms with ongoing improvements," the survey said.

The report shows that the returns to investment climate improvements can dwarf the impact of international aid flows.

"Removing trade restrictions, subsidies and other market distortions in developed countries that harm investment climates in developing countries. This can deliver benefits to developing countries worth more than four times the value of aid they receive to improve their investment climates," the report said.

Third convict

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Later, Girija Shankar Chakraborti, purohit (cleric) of Kalibari temple in Rangpur, helped him repent for the sins he committed in life. Shankar also helped him read the Gita.

Hangman Rafiqul Islam, a convict for life from Jessore Central Jail who executed two others -- former sub-inspector Moinul Hoque and constable Abdus Sattar -- on September 1, hanged Amrita.

Magistrates Tajul Islam and ATM Siddiqui Rahman, Additional Superintendent of Police Golam Rabbani, Civil Surgeon Dr Joynal Abedin and jail physician Dr Afzal Hossain were present.

After 30 minutes of the hanging Dr Abedin and Dr Hossain carried out the autopsy.

A huge crowd was waiting outside the jail during Amrita's execution. Additional police were deployed to ensure security of the jail.

Dhaka examines

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Home Minister Shivrāj Patil.

Jahangir said he had told the home minister that there were some issues between the two countries and they were 'not beyond solution'.

Jahangir, along with BSF Director General Ajai Raj Sharma, called on Patil to apprise him of the first day's biannual talks between border guards of India and Bangladesh. The home minister expressed happiness over the 'progress' of the talks.

Replying to reporters' questions about India's charge of northeastern Indian insurgents' camps in Bangladesh, Jahangir denied the existence of such camps. "We do not have even a single insurgents' camp in our territory and the addressed provided by the BSF have been found either to be a cantonment area or headquarters of the armed forces," he said.

In a sarcastic tone, Jahangir said, "Some of the addresses provided by India have even been traced to the Bay of Bengal."

Asked about India's demand that Bangladesh hand over Indian insurgent leaders like Anup Chetia of United Liberation Front of Assam, the BDR chief said: "This is for the Bangladesh home ministry to respond. We only manage the border."

Referring to India's allegation of Indian insurgents finding shelter in Bangladesh, Jahangir said, "This is only a creation of the media. I will take you people in all bordering places and let you trace an insurgents' camp for me."

Asked about the objections raised by the two sides about constructions in their respective territories, the BSF director general said a joint team would assess the situation and seek to address it in three months.

The BDR delegation also called on Indian Home Secretary Dharendra Singh and Secretary (Border Management) Ashok Kumar Rastogi.

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Alliance plans rally

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General and LGD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair yesterday planned the programme.

BNP leader Abdus Salam, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahid and central leader Abdul Qader Mollah, BJP leaders Kazi Firoz Rashid, Maidul Islam and Saifur Rahman, IOJ leaders Izharul Islam, Ahmed Abdul Qader and Abdur Rab Yusufi attended the meeting held at Bhuiyan's official residence yesterday evening.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Bhuiyan said the October 9 rally was called also to protest terrorism, anarchy and bomb explosions in the country. When asked whether the alliance will shift its October 9 rally if Awami League calls a hartal on that day, Bhuiyan said, "We don't know yet whether they will do so, but we hope they will refrain from taking such decision in the interests of maintaining a healthy political culture."

He said BNP never obstructed the main opposition in any of its programme. Responsibility to maintain a congenial political environment rests on all political parties.

Referring to the ongoing mass

arrests of opposition activists and commoners across the country, Mannan Bhuiyan said he too has heard about it. But the home ministry had informed him that police were making those arrests in an anti-crime drive ahead of the Puja, Ramadan and some other religious programmes, not to obstruct Awami League's October 3 rally, he added.

Most of the arrestees were either involved in crime or have criminal charges against them, he continued.

Bhuiyan said innocent people, if arrested mistakenly, are being released. "We don't want to harass innocent people and political activists. The authorities have instructed the police not to cause any suffering to innocent commoners," he added.

Shudhangshu

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Halder was suffering from liver cancer. His illness was diagnosed about nine months ago at a hospital in the USA. There he received treatment for about six months.

The veteran AL leader died at 8:30 last night at the Birdem hospital where he was admitted on September 3, hospital sources said.

Mass arrest put

FROM PAGE 1
Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and, in particular, to foil the opposition's October 3 grand rally in the capital.

COURT PROCEEDINGS
In its argument before the HC Division bench yesterday, the Office of the Attorney General denied the mass arrests and appealed for adjournment of the hearing.

Additional Attorney General Abdur Razzak Khan claimed the ongoing drive is a routine operation ahead of Durga Puja and Ramadan. Moving on behalf of the petitioners, Dr M Zahir argued, in the name of curbing crime, the government had no right to act like a despot and violate citizens' fundamental rights.

"During the last one week, we have been witnessing the provisions of law being challenged time and again. The government has been arresting people in a wholesale manner violating their constitutional rights," he said.

After hearing both the sides, the court issued the order forbidding the home secretary, inspector general of police and DMP commissioner from making any arrest of any citizen under Section 86 of the DMP Ordinance until October 3, pending hearing of the application for direction and injunction.

Most of the arrests in the ongoing crackdown were made under Section 86 of the DMP Ordinance, which the court has temporarily banned. But police and paramilitary forces can continue the drive under other sections of the ordinance.

RIGHTS GROUPS' SAY

At a press conference held at the Supreme Court Bar Council office yesterday, the country's leading rights and legal aid organisations said they are united to point out and protest the human rights violations taking place under the guise of maintaining law and order and eliminating terrorism.

They also announced to act in union to support and assist the victims of the indiscriminate arrests.

Rayerbazar monument

FROM PAGE 1
erecting the structure on the newly filled earth. But, I believe, they didn't," he said requesting anonymity.

The sands used during earth filling for the monument are now visible through the cracks stretching the length of the concrete platform just below the altar.

The land behind the monument, built on 6.51 acres on the bank of Haikar Khal, is being washed away by water due to incomplete and faulty slab work on the slopes.

During the three-year construction work, the slopes designed to protect the area from erosion could not be completed due to fund constraints, said an official of PWD.

A portion of the western edge of the monument has already been damaged by erosion and it is not more than 20 feet away from the main structure.

An official of housing and public works ministry said PWD has taken a project to save the monument from land erosion but the work stopped during recent flood.

"We'll look into the matter and monitor the developments," said Iqbal Uddin Ahmed, secretary of the ministry, when his attention was drawn on the matter.

The monument has been built in memory of the intellectuals who were picked up by the Pakistani occupation army and their local collaborators and then brutally murdered at Rayerbazar two days before the country earned freedom in December 1971.

Architect Rabiul Hussain, asked about the condition of the monument, told The Daily Star that the government should take step immediately before any major damage occurs.

Flood rehabilitation

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portfolio and as envisaged use of partial cancellations and savings from loan.

The ADB will hold a wrap-up meeting with the government in Phase I on the proposed EAL by first week of next month and the processing of new EAL and reallocations will follow the meeting.

Municipal and Rural infrastructure, roads, railways, water resources, and sanitation in secondary towns and support for disaster preparation and mitigation may get new EAL support.

Phase II (Mid-term to Long-term Recovery Assistance), over a period of up to five years, will be based on the new Country Strategy and Programme (CSP) expected to be approved in the middle of next year.

The proposed Phase I of the WB will be based on the use of credit savings and reallocations of the existing portfolio. Preliminary reviews indicate that between \$100 million and \$140 million could be made available. An agreement over reallocation between the govern-

ment and the WB will be signed by October 15. The processing of reallocation and WB Board approval will be completed by the end of November.

Phase II is likely to comprise of additional support to roads, including Dhaka thoroughfares and the rehabilitation of water resource management infrastructure. Financing for this phase could come from the reallocation of existing funds and possibly new funds from the WB's soft-lending window International Development Agency.

According to the draft aide memoire, the sectors that are in need of recovery assistance include housing (\$430 to \$560 million), transport (\$340 to \$380 million), water supply and sanitation (\$81 million), primary education (\$40 million), secondary education (\$30 million), health (\$6.4million), water resource management (\$72.1 million), municipal infrastructure (\$52.5 million), agriculture, fisheries and livestock (\$360 million) and microfinance (\$17 million).

700-gram heroin seized in Benapole

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police recovered 700 grams of heroin worth Tk 80 lakh from a rickshaw-puller in Benapole landport Tuesday night.

Acting on a tip off, Officer-in-Charge Jalaluddin of Benapole landport picked up Shfikul Islam, 52, from Sadipur village. Sadipur is said to have been a hub of drug traffickers.

The OC said Shafigul admitted he smuggled heroin into Benapole from West Bengal only as a carrier.

Clamp down

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Besides, the meeting decided that only the boats listed by the authorities will be allowed to operate at the outer anchorage for providing service to vessels anchored there.

Member-secretary of the anti-piracy committee Kamrul Hossain said, "The committee will slap a ban even on fishing at the outer anchorage to maintain tight security and track down the pirates."

He said CPA would provide the coast guards with a tugboat for patrolling the outer anchorage until the procurement of two special patrol boats for them. Port authorities in five months will also provide an observation tower for the coastguards.

The meeting was told that 43 attempts of piracy on the ships at the outer anchorage were made in past nine months while 26 incidents of robbery took place, he said.

Toilet at monument

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monument, they added.

The protesters later held a rally on the spot and demanded immediate dismantling of the under-construction public toilet.

"We urge the government to save the value of the monument by immediately removing it," renowned novelist Selina Hossain told the rally.

Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori said, "The martyred intellectuals laid in the graveyard remind us of their dedication for our Liberation War, freedom and democracy. But now the monument has turned out to be a dump."

She said they will submit memorandum to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and the Ministry of Liberation War and force them withdraw the toilet project at any cost.

The speakers alleged the monument area becomes a spot for drug addicts and gamblers at night. They demanded that the government should stop illegal activity there.

Renowned artists Shishir Bhattacharya and Moniruzzaman, film makers Shamim Akhter and Manzare Hasim Murad, Dr Sanowar Ali, Salma Haque and Shyamali Nasrin Chowdhury, among others, addressed the rally.

Natwar assures

FROM PAGE 12
investment, agenda for the upcoming 13th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit, and co-operation between the two countries at the UN, said a foreign ministry press release yesterday.

Earlier on Tuesday, Morshed met Palestinian Foreign Minister Farouk Kaddoumi and addressed the Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC) ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the UNGA. In his address Morshed underscored Bangladesh's strong commitment to the Palestinian cause, the press release said.

Morshed also met Jean Ping, President of the current session of the UNGA on Tuesday morning, where Ping lauded Bangladesh's contribution to the work of the UN, the press release added.

Road accident

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on the spot and injuring two bus passengers.

The injured bus passengers, identified as Khushi Begum, 30, and Shajahan, 38, succumbed to their injuries at Narsingdi Sadar Hospital. Identity of four others could not be known.

Police recovered four bodies from the spot and sent them to hospital morgue for autopsies.

Rebel strike

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An official close to Deuba who requested anonymity said the prime minister was leaning towards calling a unilateral ceasefire largely to ensure the backing of Madhav Kumar Nepal, without which his government could collapse.

The Maoists, who enjoy free rein in much of the Himalayan kingdom, have been building pressure on the government over the past month.

The rebels ordered traffic not to enter or leave Kathmandu for a week in August, sending prices of fresh produce soaring in the city of 1.5 million.

Nine Maoists were killed in clashes across Nepal Tuesday. The rebels have frequently attacked motorists and shopkeepers who disobeyed previous strikes.

Long-distance bus operators said they were not reassured by government promises of compensation if the Maoists damaged their vehicles in the latest shutdown.

"If we run buses during the strike the Maoists will take revenge, he in days or weeks later. We prefer to suffer losses for 48 hours," said P.B. Adhikari of the Nepal National Transport Commuters Association.

DATELINE IRAQ Flurry of hostage releases while violence kills nine

AFP, Baghdad

In a rare flurry of good news in Iraq, up to 10 hostages were freed, including two Italian women aid workers, raising hopes Wednesday for a captive Briton faced with a death threat and two kidnapped French journalists.

But fresh violence raged across Iraq, as nine people were killed in a string of incidents and six US troops were wounded in a car bomb attack in the northern city of Mosul.

Simona Torretta and Simona Pari, both 29, arrived at Rome's Ciampino military airport late Tuesday to be showered with hugs and flowers by their families and colleagues from their aid agency, A.Bridge to Baghdad.

Their relatives and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi boarded the Italian air force plane to welcome them.

The women, who were seized by armed men on September 7 at their Baghdad offices, stepped off the plane smiling broadly and wearing light-coloured long tunics. They crossed the tarmac holding hands and looking relaxed.

Berlusconi, who backed the US-led war to oust Saddam Hussein and has sent some 3,000 Italian troops and police to serve in the US-led coalition in Iraq, described their release as a "moment of joy".

Almost simultaneously, telecom firm Orascom announced that three Egyptians captured last week had also been released.

The three were kidnapped last week in western Iraq, together with another Egyptian and two Iraqis employed by the same company. The others were released late Monday.

Al-Arabiya television reported late Tuesday that another two Orascom employees snatched from Baghdad had also been freed, but this could not be confirmed.

Shab-e-Barat

FROM PAGE 1
Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar and other private TV channels will air special programmes, while the newspapers publish articles highlighting the significance of the Shab-e-Barat.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in separate messages felicitated the countrymen on the eve of the holy Shab-e-Barat.

In a message, the president urged all to make sincere efforts to remove all kinds of injustice from society and establish peace being imbued with the feelings of fraternity and welfare.

"Let us all pray on this night for peace, welfare and progress of the country and the Muslim ummah," the prime minister said in her message on the occasion.

She also prayed to the almighty to protect the people of the country from natural calamities as well as man-made disasters.

The Islamic Foundation and other socio-religious organisations have taken up various programmes on the occasion.

Aspical Doa mahfil will be held on the High Court Mazar premises today after the Maghreb prayers.

Jail Killing Case Court

FROM PAGE 1
Metropolitan Sessions Judge Motiur Rahman who is sitting the trial issued the arrest orders and asked the prosecution, counsel of accused-on-bail Taheruddin Thakur and Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Sutrapur Police Station to submit a report on Saifuddin's health by October 9.

The court also fixed October 9 for delivering its next order on receiving the report.

"I've discussed with defence lawyer Sharfuddin Khan Mukul and we've decided to visit Saifuddin's house on October 5 to see whether he is able to give his deposition," Public Prosecutor (PP) Abdullah Mahmud Hassan told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The court has ordered us to report on whether he (Saifuddin) can move and talk," said Mukul, Taheruddin's lawyer, who filed the petition for the deposition of Saifuddin, former deputy superintendent of police and second investigation officer of the case.

Saifuddin is suffering from paralysis and is virtually bed-ridden at his Nawabpur house in the old quarter of the city with Parkinson's disease.

Talking on the arrest order, the PP said, "According to law, the court issues such warrants after any respondent fails to turn up to court in response to a summon."

The PP and defence lawyer Mukul made a brief submission about Saifuddin's deposition after the judge took his seat at 10:54am.

At this stage, BNP lawmaker KM Obaidur Rahman, an accused on-bail, told the court: "As Saifuddin is

Police HQ

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"The statistics, therefore, show the average arrests per day for the current year are the lowest compared to previous three years," the police headquarters said.

According to the figures, the number of arrests per day at each police station is "even less than three".

And the number of arrests made till now is "even less than the orders of arrest issued by courts".

Up to August 30 this year, the courts have issued 432,319 arrest warrants, which yield an average daily figure of 1,801. During 2003, warrants of arrest were issued against 559,985, which yielded an average daily figure of 1,556.