

Ruling party abandoning the JS!

Parliament's dysfunctional cycle complete

THIS is the height of quorum crisis, one that has basically made a mockery of elections to the 8th parliament. How chronically truant the ruling party MPs have been is evidenced by the fact that the parliament reassembling on Tuesday after a four-day recess had to be adjourned for four more days in the face of a severe quorum crisis. As a matter of fact, the 15th session beginning on January 31, sans opposition presence, had lacked quorum almost every workday. If the ruling party MPs' brand of abstention from parliament had been witnessed intermittently earlier on, it has now developed into a pattern like a progressive ailment.

We have editorialised this aberrant parliamentary behaviour on the part of the ruling party MPs saying in so many words that even the disparaging opposition boycott of parliament appears in a mellowed light in the face of the BNP MPs' flippant keeping away from JS sessions. Newspapers have been replete with reports of the quorum crises leading to a palpably shocking realisation among the electorate that the elections were an exercise in futility. How much one wished that these would din good sense into the ears of the MPs.

Alas, far from a remission of the irresponsibility syndrome, one sees only a newer manifestation of the same! In the latest case, the Speaker apparently heeded the BNP lawmakers' request to adjourn the session on what we would call a pretext that they are busy attending programmes in their constituencies. In truth, can there be any bigger task for the MPs than making themselves available for the parliament sessions? It is supremely ironical that when enhancement of privileges and perks is on the agenda, MPs show a great enthusiasm for averting any quorum crisis. This is patently unconscionable, let alone their overall perfunctory attitude to parliament despite drawing generous salaries and allowances.

The tragedy is, even in the eye of the ruling party, the parliament has lost its importance, pathetically with two more years of it to go. What could be a worse indictment on the state of parliamentary democracy in the country?

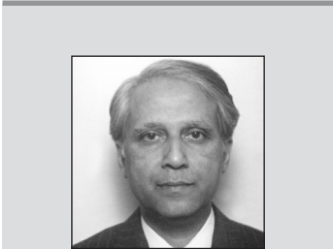
No warning system in launches

It's unbelievable!

THE admission by the launch masters that they rely only on their wisdom during storms or cyclones leaves us speechless. In other words what we can assume from this is that the precious lives of hundreds of passengers they carry are in danger from the moment they board the launches. And such a revelation coming just under the heel of sinking of a launch in storm in Buriganga killing 149 passengers cannot be ignored either. That the launches have no system to warn them about storms once they are on their way only reveals the stark inadequacies in the system under which the launches operate.

It is totally unacceptable that there simply is no weather forecasting system or warning system on the launches. Especially in a time when wireless communication technology has brought the whole world closer. The blame for such callousness has to be shared by all -- the owners, operators, and most of all the authorities. Do they not know that mercurial changes in the weather resulting in storms or cyclones are totally unpredictable without an access to the existing technology? How could they not think about it earlier and continued to put the lives of thousands of innocent passengers in jeopardy? Why do we always wait for a disaster to happen before taking any action?

We know that in the cases of cyclones, a warning system is in place in the coastal areas where danger signals are announced about an impending calamity through loudspeakers and available media. Then why not a similar system for the launch operators? A mobile phone or a walkie-talkie in each of the launches should be enough to transmit messages in case of needs. At the same time, there must be successive periodic weather bulletins issued to the launch masters at the terminals. The authorities must be one step ahead in taking precautionary measures. We reiterate our demand for a comprehensive safety plan for the launch passengers to be put in place and, most importantly, implemented.



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

JOURNALISTS, in my opinion, play an extremely important role in safeguarding not only the fabric of our society but also the waft and the weave that makes the nation function up to its expected values. The periodicity of their reporting and their views, create the necessary matrix that shapes public opinion.

Inversely, the nature of their job also creates responsibility.

Journalists by their very definition are connected intimately with various processes and tasks -- gathering and transmission of news, business management of journals or advertising. All these factors assume greater importance given the emergence of the electronic media and the concept of 'hard news' as opposed to news value with marginal significance.

The situation has become that much more complex given the advent of radio and television live reporting, which brings news bulletins to the public with speed that the press cannot hope to match. To hold their audience, the newspapers are then forced to provide increasing quantities of interpretive material -- articles on the background of the news, personality sketches and columns of timely comment by writers skilled in presenting opinion in readable form. News magazines resort to a similar pattern where much of their reporting is blended news with editorial comment.

Mass circulation magazines similarly try to hold on to public attention by devoting space to topics that would have the impact of

novelty and could provoke discussion.

Photo journalism on the other hand devotes emphasis on capturing original facet of an issue or story and creating through the photograph specific interest for the viewer. From that point of view, it cannot only supplement or add texture to a news item but also enhance the focus of the subject matter.

It is this sensitivity that makes journalism so interesting.

tates to continue to receive public affairs advertisements. Security interests as defined by various government agencies also influence reporting of incidents or activities. This latter factor specially affects transparency.

Unfortunately, these elements juxtapose together to erode objectivity.

On the other hand, in the name of freedom of expression, views are sometimes expressed which, to say the least, can be very irresponsible.

of governance failures. On the other hand, newspapers, recognised as being associated with the opposition political parties, only focus on criticism and failures of government policies. In the process, objective appraisal sometimes suffer in reporting by both sides -- in their editorials as well as in their op-ed pieces.

This trend is creating difficulties. It is also leading to unfortunate partisanship and 'divides.'

I believe that time has come for

absence of resources required to ensure clean drinking water, preservation of the environment, flora and fauna and proper tackling of communicable diseases like AIDS or tuberculosis.

Journalists have to rise over their immediate interests. They have to look beyond their narrow confines. Globalisation has transcended borders and over time nation states are beginning to think in terms of a region. Near at hand we have seen how the ASEAN has

tion and the nexus that exists between criminals and politicians on the one hand and law and order enforcement officials on the other.

In Bangladesh, journalists of all descriptions, both in rural or urban areas, in small towns or mega cities, have demonstrated their willingness to take on difficult problems and expose shortcomings in every Administration. This has included exposing criminal activities associated with drug peddling and smuggling of contraband items including arms. This has resulted in many journalists making the ultimate sacrifice.

It is my belief that their exemplary approach has not been in vain.

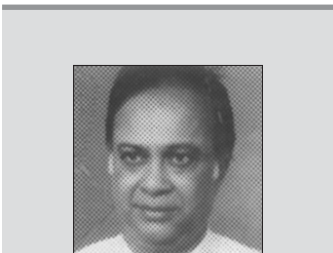
The SAARC Summit scheduled to have been held in Dhaka has been postponed till all members can agree on new dates. This sudden postponement has generated tension and recriminations. However, this postponement, as I have written earlier, does not mean the end of the SAARC process. I believe, this has only underlined the need for Member States to consider how best stability can be encouraged within a region which faces unique challenges.

South Asian journalists have a crucial task ahead of them in this context. They have to rise over their national limitations and contribute jointly through institutionalised cooperation towards all countries in this region being able to meet the Millennium Development Goals. They have to encourage their respective countries to meet the challenges of growth, job creation, trade and foreign direct investment on one hand and service deliveries to poor communities on the other.

This will require broad partnership involving the public and private sectors and also the civil society. Journalists have to be the catalysts to move the region forward through the principle of objective journalism.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to mzamir@dhaka.net.

Has South Asian political climate worsened much of late?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

CERTAIN developments in the South Asian region in recent times has given rise to speculations whether the overall political climate has worsened causing some irritation in the area where the situation was broadly healthy in the preceding year. The postponement of the scheduled 13th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for the second time and developments in Nepal marking the dismissal of an elected government definitely caused fissures in the region. Consequently, the political climate in the region is coming in for fresh review with many veering towards the opinion that the climate has deteriorated of late. And they also tend to believe that this may inexorably slide towards further worsening, albeit not seriously. However, it does not seem logical that the situation has nose dived even though signs of some rupture are discernible.

But it was not like that when the new year had stepped in following a year that was largely trouble free for the South Asia. Although a catastrophic tsunami badly struck several countries at the fag end of the 2004 leading to the postponement

of the much-awaited 13th summit meeting of the seven-nation SAARC for the first time, last year had been remarkably peaceful for South Asia. When viewed in the context of perennial political tensions which is undoubtedly the hallmark of the region mainly because of enmity and rivalry of two principal players of the regional spectrum India and Pakistan, the year 2004 was a phase of reconciliation and rapprochement that had impacted positively on the overall political climate of the most densely

fortunately took a back seat throughout the last year and augured well in the new year. The relatively and reasonably good New Delhi-Islamabad bilateral ties had cast a sobering effect in the region that also helped the regional forum SAARC to proceed with its normal activities of collective cooperation including preparation for staging the 13th SAARC summit at the beginning of the new year.

But the scenario changed quickly surrounding the second postponement of the summit in Dhaka as India expressed its unwillingness to

ranted postponement of the SAARC summit remains a big question. The free press in India by and large was critical of the decision of New Delhi on this issue. Certain questions came up like -- did Rajiv Gandhi not attend the first SAARC summit in Dhaka in 1985 when Pakistan was under a military dictator and the head of the government of the host nation was also perceived by many as not a democratic leader? India later scaled down the security situation in Bangladesh as a reason for prime minister Dr. Manmohan

speak for the record while the event is supposed to be an annual one.

Earlier, SAARC summits had to be postponed for long time owing to the political differences of India and Pakistan. The 11th summit scheduled for Katmandu saw an unusual delay for more than a year as two traditional foes stood on the brink of a war and the summit was made possible only after the decks were cleared following assiduous efforts. Then once again, the last summit in Islamabad was a victim of the same problem as the event was subjected to long delay. Indo-Pak bilateral ties

there that all countries of the region are willing to put the recent unhappy experience behind and new dates are being explored for the SAARC summit. New Delhi itself is understood to be keen for a new time schedule and this reflects the commitment towards the SAARC even in the midst of differences otherwise. The cynics of the SAARC should nurture not too negative illusion since the regional forum's march is irreversible no matter whatever the progress made by the forum in last two decades.

There is hardly any alternative to SAARC and the achievements are not meaningless given the resource constraint and political problems in South Asia. After all, SAARC cannot roll back and summits are destined to take place and the next one cannot be too far off. However, a convenient time for all the seven countries is not very easy since they have domestic and international commitments. Interactions between the member states are certainly continuing like Indian external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh paying a visit to Pakistan. Misunderstandings and problems are not unusual but must not be allowed to come in the way of larger interests. Goodwill and a sense of understanding must be brought into play as far as possible even under adverse situations for collective good in a region where a vast segment of people still live under abject poverty. Collective efforts for socio-economic progress in the region must not lag behind because of trouble and misunderstanding that are not uncommon features governing the relations among nations in South Asia.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

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.

Power sharing in BGMEA

At first, I thank and congratulate the BGMEA leaders who have created an example of power sharing at the BGMEA, the largest trade body of the country. It is really a good sign and good step for the garments industry. BGMEA leaders have made the right decision, arriving in a single platform to boost the garments industry in the wake of the quota phase-out.

Obviously, they will lead the trade body ahead judiciously to enrich the garments sector and resolve any trouble that might crop up.

As per the understanding, the presidency of the BGMEA will rotate among the three top leaders.

We are very much optimistic to see their consensus through reaching a single platform which will lead trade and business towards progress and prosperity.

Similarly, we do hope to see this kind of unity in our national politics. Our national politics is not going smoothly as we expected. I've noticed many leaders are engaged in blaming each other, putting aside the development of the country and thus the relationship becomes sour among the parties and the country's economic condition goes from bad to worse.

In reality, Bangladesh could not make the desired economic progress due to political instability.

Since the independence, it has been experiencing political instability. Political imbroglio has become a chronic malady and it

has crippled the country beyond measure.

I think time has come to think about the country, though rather belatedly. It is the time to spurn the politics of hartal and destruction for ever. It's the prime responsibility of the three major political parties, the BNP, Awami League and Jamaat to forge unity for the greater collective good.

Hopefully, this unity will keep political instability away and take the country towards progress. I humbly request all who write in this column to express their valuable opinions on this issue.

Awlad
Tejgaon, Dhaka

Don't cry for the criminals!

Actually we have a bad habit.

Sometimes we become over emotional, we start talking about the human rights of the inhuman terrorists. When Ershad Shikdar was in jail and preparing himself to be punished, some of our newspapers and TV channels started shedding tears for him, they were publishing his photo and interviews of his relatives to draw attention of the public. A newspaper also published a long report on Ershad Shikdar's life, his likes and dislikes, his favourite food, his favourite wife, what made him run after Shova (his 2nd/3rd wife), what he wanted to eat before his death. What the hell? They spoke as if Ershad Shikdar was a hero or something! A heinous killer does not deserve affection and sympathy.

As usual, some people are still pleading for the terrorists, trying to save them from crossfire. Cantara Wali Ruhi
On e-mail

Are we independent?

The killing of innocent people, the latest being Mr Kibria, has shocked the nation. Typical reactions ranged from programme for downfall of the government to inviting FBI. I am seriously concerned about the fact that political parties (government and opposition), intellectuals, newspapers, the bereaved family members are all united on the idea of inviting FBI to investigate the case. What a shame.

1. Does an independent nation ever invite foreign intelligence to look into a domestic problem?
2. Do they know Bangladesh more than our police/intelligence?
3. They have asked for full

independence and full access. Can't our judicial department/civil service / police do the job better if given the same?

4. Who will ensure their (FBI) independence given the US history of dictating the economic and political decision making process of developing nations?

I think nobody questions the need to go to the bottom of this menace. However, inviting a foreign investigation agency is not the solution. We must have independent people in the country of 140 million.
MF Fakhru
Cambridge, UK

We, Bengalees

I am an Indian who was once based in Dhaka and used to subscribe to The Daily Star. Still read it, time permitting on the net.

Really liked the beautifully described sense of frustration felt by Rubana Haq in her piece. The lady has managed to amplify the sense of frustration that I as a fellow Bengali and human being felt when dealing with the educated youngsters who could speak perfect Americanised English but could not write two correct sentences.

Let us for once forget the fact we as a race are divided and instead try and work towards enriching the future Bengali generation. Let us not design curriculum that teaches nothing and promotes mediocrity, we Bengalees are far better than that. Once again my compliments to the good lady, she sure struck a chord in me.

Arijit Sengupta
Calcutta

Who is safe?

Your February 15 issue carried an eye-opening story from Rajshahi. The said report mentioned how Shibir cadres were beating up Chhatra Dai (JCD) members to force the latter to attend religious indoctrination sessions on a college campus. If even ruling party men are not safe from the tyranny of these Islamo-fascists, who is? When the shock troops of religious tyranny do not spare their own nominal coalition partners from methodical persecution, can too many of us feel safe? While its parent organisation is still slumbering under the elixir of power, one hopes that JCD is waking up to the reality of partnering with religious tyrants.
Esam Sohail
US