



STAR

Bravo, Tigers

Make winning a habit

CONGRATULATIONS to the Tigers, and to all those directly associated with the management of the team, for winning the series against New Zealand, and that too with one match to play. This was a well deserved win where the team has out played the opponent in all the departments of the game. And here Shakib must be made special mention of for leading from the front, as must be Jimmy Siddons and his assistants for a good job off the field.

This is the first series win against a top string team of a leading test playing country in the world. A series win has come after a long wait and expectation, and after many years of frustration and anguish, and it has come not a day too soon.

What makes the event memorable is the fact that the win was achieved on home soil and while playing at home may have its advantages, the sheer pressure of living up to the expectations of the home crowd can impact on the performance of the players. It is comforting to see our cricketers withstand the pressure well. Hardly have we seen such consistency in our team and their repeat performance, as a gelled entity in all three ODIs, suggests that they have acquired a good degree of maturity and big game temperament. Certainly, confidence is something that the team has achieved greatly.

So far we had been rather used to seeing one off wins, every now and then. While we had managed to win against every test playing nation, our performance over the years has been inconsistent. We would hope that while the players should take great pride in this win, it must not be allowed to go to their heads. We have a long way to go yet, and while the journey so far has been tortuous, we commend the players and the management for keeping faith in themselves and the team and withstanding the none-too-charitable comments that emanated from time to time from some of the members of the international cricket fraternity.

One distinctly notices the improvements made by the players in various aspects of the game. It was so very heartening to see all the chances taken including the fabulous run out in the third match. One would hope that the progress made so far will be retained and applied in future with equal efficiency and commitment.

We feel that the very apt heading in the sports section of The Daily Star yesterday encapsulates the general feeling as regards the victory of Bangladesh over New Zealand. The Tigers have roared like never before. We want the Tigers to continue in the same vein. We wish them good luck, particularly for the ensuing World Cup starting Feb next.

Woes of Chittagong Port

Bring about a lasting and equitable solution

IT is not very often that we address the same issue in quick succession in our editorial columns. On Chittagong port we are doing so, it being a major issue that strikes at the very heart of our economy, affecting the country's trade and commerce directly. The day before in this column we had urged upon the government to act with speed in order to restore the normal functions of the port. It has since been done.

Reportedly, the port has resumed its normal function to its full potentials, with the workers, including those that had gone on strike, back to work, and all this after the deployment of the army. And that begs the question. Why did it have to come to such a pass, having endured great loss for the last several days of inactivity in Chittagong port, that the army had to be called in to restore the status quo ante?

And we have several questions that need answers to. Looking at the goings on in the port over the last two years Chittagong Port it appears to us a classic example of good and efficient machinery turned completely unproductive through political ineptitude and lack of insight. It was an efficient system that this government inherited that has made been fully dysfunctional. Why so?

It merits mention that the erstwhile caretaker government had managed to turn the once incompetent systems into an efficient one. The long turn around time was brought down to about three and it remained so till the elected government took over charge. Surely, there must have been something right that the CTG had done to improve the state of the operation of the country's major port. Certainly, the functioning was streamlined and the loose ends taken care of. It seems to us that the good work of the past has been undone by the present all on partisan political grounds. Populist game was played against economic sense and the interest of the country.

What the government has done by calling in the army is apply an ad hoc measure which, we are afraid, will not be able to bring a lasting solution to the problem. And the army's presence at the port cannot be a permanent feature, not even a midterm one. What can be a durable solution though is an equitable arrangement addressing the core contradictions in the management practices.

We recommend that the CPA, the berth operators and the workers' representatives, sit across the table without further delay and work out a solution to the prevailing problem that must be satisfactory to all the parties concerned, including addressing the genuine grievances of the workers.

We suggest too that the definition of the term 'berth operators' as it exists today in the gazette be broadened to be more inclusive so that there is ample opportunity for others to participate.

There is also need to address the problem of management of the port which in its present form appears ad hoc at best.

How democratic are we?

In a democracy, the major concern of the government should be the welfare and the wellbeing of the nation and its people. It is unfortunate that while the ruling party is fiercely engaged in serving its coterie and partisan interests, the people are groaning under the weight of multiple problems of day to day living.

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

THIS is perhaps the only country in the world where there is so much talk of democracy and yet so little in practice. Even the illegal usurpers of power within days of entering into the arena start talking of democracy. True though that there were elected governments that came and went away since we gained our independence, but then that is all there is to it. All governments elected or unelected have been dictatorial and fascistic in nature and character. None of them has worked for democracy in the real sense of the term.

Elections are held, governments are installed, and yet there is no sign of democracy anywhere. It may sound rather unkind and unduly abrasive to say that our politicians and political managers of the state neither understand nor care for the very basic principles of democracy. We do not practice democracy at any stage of our lives starting from the family down to the various levels of governance of the

state. How can democracy flourish in an environment where dissident views and freedom of the press are being gagged at random? How can democracy flourish where the interests of the common man continue to be ignored time after time?

Seminars, talk shows on democracy are held day in and day out; it is all empty rhetoric, sound and fury signifying nothing. All governments have ruled through a concoction of manipulated governance in the name of democracy and democratic practice. To be truthful and honest, so far we have found very little difference between an elected government and an unelected one. Admittedly we do have legacy of "glorious movements" launched successfully by Bengalis against all sorts of injustices and oppression. But it is all a part mere history today.

Ever since our independence, to put it mildly, we have not been able to conduct ourselves as a matured nation. True to the character of the Bengalis we are still stuck in the groove of jealousy, hatred, anger, vengeance and retaliation. Without exception, the rich or the poor, the mighty

and the powerful, we are a bunch of petty people having no understanding and appreciation of sagacity, wisdom and vision. We are unable to think and work beyond family levels. We are masters of breaking our cardinal institutions essential in a democracy rather than build or empower the existing ones. Our success and failure are based on false premises. Arrogance and revenge dominate our thinking. We are simply incapable of any sane and sober thinking. We often fail to distinguish between failure and success. We take intelligence for wisdom. We are devoured by our anger. We take out guns at the slightest of provocations to resolve a dispute that could easily be resolved through dialogue and discussions.

One of the major constraints that stand in our way to democratic governance is our inability to yield and contain the power vested in us in a rational and logical way.

In a democracy, the major concern of the government should be the welfare and the wellbeing of the nation and its people. It is unfortunate that while the ruling party is fiercely engaged in serving its coterie and partisan interests, the people are groaning under the weight of multiple problems of day to day living and the administration is busy singing its glorious achievements. The other day, one of our retired chief justices had rightly pointed out that the country's governance is heavily loaded with tender snatchers, intimidators; all kinds of conspirators etc. He is not too far from the truth.

This administration often takes loaded decisions ignoring people's concerns. Closure of the CNG filling stations between six and nine pm, which has increased the misery of the people, is one such classic example. To be honest, it has now become one of the most oppressive measures this government has taken so far. What hurts most is the fact none of the logic presented in support of such an action has been proved right. It is hurting the individual family budget since they have to buy frequently patrol to run their vehicles costing nearly four times as much. I have been running my car on petrol for the past few days. Such is the case with many. One day I asked a gentleman as to whose fault is that we are undergoing such pain. He wiped the sweat off his brows and said, "I guess we can only call it destiny".

One might think as to what relevance has it got with democracy? It has everything to do. It is reflective of two major factors that are missing with this government caring for the people and that it has lost touch with the people for all practical purposes.

If maters are allowed to continue this way we are in for a long hot summer and democracy will fly out the window as it did on so many previous occasions. If that happens we shall have none to blame, but us. For all practical purposes we are turning out to be a nation without a soul.

Shamsher Chowdhury is a columnist for The Daily Star.

Storm in a teacup

I do not see Omar Abdullah becoming a rallying point for the protesters asking for azadi. The whole thing may not turn out to be more than a storm in a teacup. Except for the BJP, no other political party has made Omar Abdullah's remarks an issue.

KULDIP NAYAR

TIMING is an important factor for politicians. They should know when to speak. If they do not know what should be said and when, they can land themselves in trouble. India's first Governor General C. Rajagopalachari was correct in supporting the demand for Pakistan in 1942. But since he was a tall leader of the Congress, which was opposed to the demand at that time, he was not only vehemently criticised but also made to feel like a persona non-grata in the party.

Somnath Chatterjee did not obey the order of his party, the CPI (M), to resign from the speakership because he felt the timing was wrong. He was presiding over the session when India's nuclear treaty had come under the hammer, to be voted upon. The CPI (M) turned him out of the party. Later, many of its stalwarts regretted the decision and felt that they should have waited till after the voting, when he would have resigned as he had indicated.

Similarly, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's outburst in the state assembly had come at a wrong time. His statement that the state acceded to India in 1948, without merging with the country, is correct factually and historically. His grandfather Sheikh Abdullah, then the state's prime minister, joined the Union on the condition that New Delhi would hold only three subjects -- defence, foreign affairs and communications -- and leave the rest to the

state. New Delhi accepted the condition.

Omar Abdullah's enunciation of that had come at a wrong time. He should have known that the valley is in ferment and the people are asking for azadi. His drawing the line between accession and merger at this time was bound to be misunderstood. The pro-azadi protesters have interpreted it as putting a question mark over India's claim that Kashmir is its integral part. Hardliner Syed Shah Gillani has already said that Omar Abdullah is "speaking" his language.

On the other hand, Omar Abdullah has diluted his credentials in India. Even the Congress party has said that Omar Abdullah's statement in the state assembly looks different from the not-long-ago affirmation in the Lok Sabha that he was an Indian to the applause of the country.

It is understandable that he was under pressure when he made the statement in the assembly. More than 100 people had died due to a clash between those who were stone pelting and the security forces. But the forbearance and stamina of a person is tested during the stress. As the chief minister, he cannot pass the buck. He looked like making the centre a scapegoat for his troubles. He has to be circumspect in what he says and does. I feel Omar Abdullah lacks maturity, not integrity.

The chief minister's statement that he is "not a puppet" is another sad commentary on the Indian federal structure. It means that the centre flexes its muscles whenever it wants to make the states to fall in line. The

statement also shows Omar Abdullah in a poor light. Why should he give the impression to New Delhi that he is malleable and can be bent through pressure? One has not heard the remark of being "a puppet" from other chief ministers. There must have been something to make him say this.

What is Kashmir's status, when the state has signed the instrument of accession and has not merged, can be debated by people who have not taken oath under the Indian constitution. When Omar Abdullah assumed office, he swore by the constitution, which says that Kashmir is an integral part of India. True, there is a special status given to Kashmir (Article 370) within India, not outside the Union.

Sheikh Abdullah paid the price of transgressing that Lashman rekha, and was under detention for 12 years. He was Jawaharlal Nehru's best friend who, apparently, felt that the Sheikh had crossed the limits. He returned to power only after avowing allegiance to the Indian constitution and ruled the state as long as he lived.

I do not think that things will come to such a pass again because New Delhi has learnt not to be too sensitive. And I do not see Omar Abdullah becoming a rallying point for the protesters asking for azadi. The whole thing may not turn out to be more than a storm in a teacup. Except for the BJP, no other political party has made Omar Abdullah's remarks an issue.

Omar Abdullah's party, National Conference, has gone over the exercise of pushing New Delhi to the 1953 position, when the Sheikh signed an agreement with New Delhi. Farooq Abdullah, Omar's father, was then the chief minister and New Delhi was ruled by the BJP. There was so much pressure exerted on Farooq Abdullah that he had to put the resolution passed by the state assembly on autonomy in cold storage.

This does not, however, mean that New

Delhi's encroachment on the power, which belongs to the state, is justified. Acts, which have been passed in the field, other than three subjects -- defence, foreign affairs and communications -- have to be withdrawn. The centre cannot occupy the territory that goes beyond three subjects.

It is welcome to note that Omar Abdullah said that Pakistan must be associated with the solution of Kashmir. India has itself said many a time, from the Tashkent declaration to the Shimla agreement that Kashmir remained to be solved. Therefore, no solution can be lasting without Islamabad's agreement.

It is a coincidence. But the interview by Barkha Dutt, a television star, with former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, has brought to the fore the Kashmir solution which both Pakistan and India had found acceptable. It was only to be inked. The formula is reportedly still acceptable to India but not to the Asif Zardari government in Pakistan. New Delhi has to pursue the formula vigorously.

What surprises me is that the Kashmiris have not yet realised, after sacrificing thousands of their men, that India would never accept a position where the state opts for a status outside the country. New Delhi may be willing to go beyond the Indian constitution but not the Indian Union. Understandably, the borders can be irrelevant but not erased.

Some quarters in Pakistan have realised this because, as former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, said once: "We cannot take Kashmir from you forcibly, nor can you offer it on a platter." The two countries would have to find a peaceful solution. One Pakistani political commentator wrote some time back: "What we could not win in the war, we cannot get at the negotiating table."

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