

## Is Khaleda Hasina talks at all possible?

*That's the demand of the hour*

THE express resolve at the BEA-FBCCI seminar to bring Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina across the table and the thunderous applause from the audience greeting it on Thursday brought to the fore a simple truth: people want an end to the confrontational politics the country has been subjected to for all these years. They expect Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina to come to terms on the urgent need to make their politics productive and constructive in the greater interest of the country. People want them both to engage in constructive dialogues and reach a consensus on issues of vital national interest. Another highlight of the seminar was the promise of the BNP secretary-general and the deputy leader of the opposition to work to this end. The organisers, the Bangladesh Economic Association and the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, certainly deserve credit for striking the right chord.

It is easier said than done, though. We have seen many such initiatives crash on the rocks of obduracy of the two leaders. In the end, while the bitterness has increased, the two ladies have grown further apart. Increasing hostilities between the ruling BNP and the main opposition Awami League have told on national politics and, more importantly, the country's socio-economic development prospects. At this juncture, Prime Minister Khaleda and Leader of the Opposition Hasina must be drawn across the table for constructive dialogue. The initiative has to be genuine and should stem from within the parties they are at the helm of. Encouragingly, the BNP secretary-general and the deputy leader of the opposition have both acknowledged the significance of such a dialogue and hopefully, they will set the process in motion.

Once it crystallises, the civil society and the media can pave the platform for the two ladies to get together and work things out across the negotiation table. We don't expect them to resolve their differences to the last bit; however, what we do hope for is that they open the channel of communication so as to reach a point where the momentum for a continual dialogue will have been automatically built.

In this direction, the government has to go more than half the way. It must acknowledge that parliamentary system of governance entitles the opposition to a space both within and outside the Jatiya Sangsad to enable them to air their views on the performance and policies of the government and sometimes go public with those in the form of rallies and meetings. One the other hand, the opposition should not oppose the government for the opposition's sake but try to cooperate with the government in matters of common stake and interest which need no elaboration. They must keep the nation above party at any cost and thereby compete positively in winning the hearts of the people.

## Children in jail

*A sore point in justice system*

MORE than 400 children are languishing in the Dhaka Central Jail -- an extremely disquieting piece of news that. When the adult inmates of jails in the country, many of whom under-trial prisoners, live in subhuman conditions, it is a gross violation of basic human norms. But when under-aged prisoners are shabbily treated it mocks at the very core of the justice system. Their best years are being spoilt through culpable negligence of the state.

A report carried by a Bangla daily shows that the legal process is also not proceeding smoothly when it comes to the so-called juvenile delinquents. The issue should be examined in all its ramifications, if only because it has a great bearing on a section of poor children, who end up in jail for some reason or the other.

It is difficult to believe that all of them have been meted out a kind of treatment that only hardened criminals could deserve. The truth is they are victims of circumstances. The street boys are often engaged in various activities in which the element of risk is very high. They are deployed as picketers, and hired to help drug runners and illegal dealers of explosives.

When a crime is committed, police can easily arrest the street boys. But the men behind the scene who deploy them are never brought to book. In fact, they not only perpetrate culpable crimes but also make sure that the under-aged boys finally become scapegoats. If the decision-makers have any qualms about the budding lives being wasted in the dungeons of a veritable hell, euphemistically called jail, they must not allow the real culprits to go unpunished.

The handling of the issue by police should also improve vastly. The boys are often shown as much older than they actually are, to fulfil the legal requirements. Again, nothing can be more inhuman than prosecuting anybody on the basis of facts and figures that are concocted.

The rights of children should not be reduced to intangible ideas suitable only for academic discussions. The government should immediately find out the actual number of the imprisoned children, send them to the penitentiary if that is what a particular case demands, and ensure speedy disposal of the cases about children.

MD NURUL HUDA

HERE is a premonition that when the unhooked purveyors of violence reappear following the termination of Operation Clean Heart the usual establishment, more specifically the police organization will not be able to satisfactorily contain and control the law and order situation. While that fear is not absolutely without foundation, the time has probably come to take a long hard look at the objective conditions with a view to ensuring a peaceful society.

There is no doubt that the foremost prerequisite for a bearable law and order situation is the political will. There should not be much despondency on this count because the chief executive, the Prime Minister has demonstrated her firm resolve abundantly. Since safety of the people is the highest law no time is premature to commence a campaign in furtherance of that objective. As the buck stops at the Prime Minister's place the necessity and timing of the present operation need not be questioned. The skeptics may wait for the precipice but the nation cannot. So what should the leaders, in whom the nation has reposed its trust, do to contain and control the situation. They may like to ponder over the following which, however, are not the exclusive and only remedial measures.

a) Since incidents causing concern have occurred in mostly urban growth centres attracting large scale publicity and possibly discouraging potential and actual investors, both local and foreign, these areas need to be policed on a priority basis. Extensive preventive measures have to be taken here on a long term basis with active collaboration of representative leaders. In such efforts as mentioned above, persons accused of criminal activities must be denied decisive participation until the courts have cleared them. Prominent leaders in focal positions have to be bold in public interest. Events of not-too-distant past have proved that patrons of criminal activities are not assured of popular support, how even high or mighty they might once have been.

As and when law enforcement functionaries will operate in an atmosphere of public support they can work wonders. Examples in this regard are aplenty -- both at home and abroad. The initiative must come from those in authority. Good deeds will generate good will and the necessary resource support.

b) As one thinks of resource, the element of immediate and prompt relief comes to mind. The response time to distress calls figures prominently in public mind. Despite the built-in difficulties and constraints it is still perhaps possible for the

area. The hartals are an urban phenomenon. Large floating populations, presence of gullible rural migrants give rise to crimes involving cheating, fraud etc. Large population and heavy densities increase anonymity. The flow of large cash increases the temptation as well as the opportunity for crime. Offences against person always draw excited attention.

Under situations as above, vocal public opinion supported by vigilant and active press can put pressure on police for improved behaviour and performance. The urban areas

There is, therefore, an urgent need for increasing the cadre of investigating officers. Serious examination is necessary to restructure the police hierarchy to secure a larger number of officers to handle investigational work and to formulate a yardstick indicating the quantum of efficient handling of investigation by one officer. Exclusive attention to investigation deserves priority, to start with.

The strengthening of forensic science laboratory facilities and scientific aids to detection of crime, adequate supply of printed forms

training and education to develop greater professional competence. A wholly law and order oriented force has to be so transformed that while retaining the keen appreciation of its prime responsibility for crime prevention and maintenance of law and order, it also develops an understanding of the larger social issues. It may no longer remain a force for status quo. Therefore, the main thrust of training should be towards an enlargement in the content of police training from law and order and crime prevention to a greater sensitivity and understanding of

tem. The recruiting process and the training institutions should make the constable aware of these possibilities as a motivation. The majority of the constabulary in the future should be well educated initially and further educated by departmental training. The revised system that we like to visualize may be such in which a good number of constables will have to be trained and developed as a potential investigation officers who can, with experience handle discreet work independently.

The police image largely depends on the appreciation by the citizens, of the attitudes, conduct and response of the constabulary. The constable should be taught how to address the fellow citizens. It should be daily indoctrinated on the job by the personal example of superior officers. The correct behaviour can be ensured by the courteous conduct of the supervisory and senior officers in their interaction with both the people and the constables.

Finally, institution bashing which wittingly or unwittingly has become the favourite pass time of some self-serving individuals will definitely not augur well for the nation. We would do well to remember that despite the mistrust and misgivings, the police, inter-alia, continues to be the principal investigating agency for the state as incorporated in the statute book. It should only be proper and wise to dispassionately find out the causes of under performance and come up with remedies. Wiser societies have ventured in that direction and thus helped themselves in laying the strong foundation of a democratic polity. Since none of us would like to live in a stateless society, we would all like to earnestly and quickly repair the cracks that appear to have surfaced in a vital organ of the state.

The "Operation Clean Heart" has been instrumental in the creation of a conducive climate. Now is the time to embark upon the much needed police reform for ensuring peace.

MD Nurul Huda is a former Secretary and IG of Police.

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Dhaka Metropolitan Police to reach a place of occurrence within twenty minutes on an average basis, if they have, say an additional 50 better motorized transports as of now with concomitant telecommunication support. That, many would perhaps agree, is not a tall order.

c) Information or intelligence by whatever name we call it, would be a vital tool in control and containment. Be it an operation to recover illegal fire arms or to nab saboteurs/criminals including drug traffickers, the pre-eminence of information demands serious consideration. The resources allocated, though registering an increase compared to yesteryears, are not adequate. Better and efficient intelligence will greatly minimize public inconvenience and reduce embarrassment. Fruitful intelligence leading to spectacular results must be a precondition of increased resource allocation.

d) Law and order problems develop rapidly and arise frequently in urban areas owing to the existence of various organized groups such as students, labours, white collar workers, all concentrated in a small

and standardized stationery and the introduction of computers amongst others will hopefully substantially remove the present deficiency in investigational work.

The effective supervision of an investigation would call for-

1) A test visit to the scene of crime  
2) A cross check with the complainant and a few important witnesses to ensure that their version has been correctly brought on police record and that whatever clues they had in view have been pursued by the police  
3) Periodic discussion with the investigation officer to ensure continuity of attention to the case.  
f) Training is an essential input for making the police face and tackle a difficult job but at the same time vulnerability of the police to external factors, organizational, administrative and situational circumstances has to be appreciated. Paramilitary postures and attitudes have become ineffective and outdated in dealing with most of the situations. A qualitative change in police perspective and approach demands corresponding change in the police culture and a much greater effort in

human behaviour, the imbibing of communication skills and development of citizen oriented activities.

For the present, will remain restricted to the training of constables which constitute the overwhelming bulk of the police force. For various reasons the constabulary at present has little to motivate it to a meaningful and positive performance of police tasks with a full understanding of the implications and objectives of police action. They often function mechanically in situations where they are required to exercise their discretion and judgement. They operate rigidly in circumstances which demand flexibility of approach and understanding of the opposite point of view. The objective, therefore, should be improvement in the quality of the constabulary towards an effective and humane policing, to be achieved through better recruitment material, purposeful training and a new organizational culture.

The prospect and opportunity within the police may have to be so modeled as to enable the able and deserving constables to steadily reach the higher levels in the sys-

tem. The recruiting process and the training institutions should make the constable aware of these possibilities as a motivation. The majority of the constabulary in the future should be well educated initially and further educated by departmental training. The revised system that we like to visualize may be such in which a good number of constables will have to be trained and developed as a potential investigation officers who can, with experience handle discreet work independently.

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# Foreign policy challenges and possible responses

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

BRIAN White (of Staffordshire University) describes foreign policy as that area of governmental activity which is concerned with relationship between the States and other actors, particularly other States, in the international system. Roy Jone's definition of foreign policy as penetrating all that is fundamental to continued human existence was dramatic and perhaps fuelled by the Cuban crisis, which had brought the world to the brink of extinction. Whether foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends at the "water's edge" or bridges the boundary between nation states and their international environment, it is important for all, particularly for "small-big" states like ours (small in size but big in population and aspirations), to study the three central concepts of decision, decision makers, and decision making process to understand foreign policy.

Foreign policy like domestic policy is formulated within the state. Yet it can be influenced, and often is, by the likes of De Gaulle's grand designs or Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik, which have to be tailored within the expected responses to events occurring in the international environment. But the end of the Cold War and consequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia and the phenomenal changes in the Eastern Europe have significantly changed foreign policy responses and their analysis. Constancy, however, have remained in "what 'why' 'how' in analytical framework as have difficulties in acquisition of hard fact information about foreign policy events either in "close government ethos" as in Britain and many other countries, in surfeit of information/disinformation, subjectivism of the

decision makers particularly in authoritarian and/or oligarchic state system where the opinion of one person or a few based on subjective considerations determine foreign policy responses, primary tendency to outperform the previous governments having scant regard as to whether the new policy responses to old foreign policy issues are qualitatively superior to those made by the group now sitting in the opposition benches, lack of bipartisan or multi partisan approach to issues which are fundamentally national in character and thereby should be above domestic political squabble, ethnocentrism i.e. "placing of a particular country at the

Chechnya case whereas North Korea will have to face (albeit justifiably) US led international pressure to abandon its nuclear card.

The common adage that one can choose one's friends but not neighbours may put foreign policy framers in uncomfortable position where to demonstrate their "independence" and "patriotism" they tend to follow policy which may prove to be counterproductive in the long run. As the second half of the last century Europe has shown us relations between neighbours do not have to sail through rough waters. On the contrary the process of globalisation and the new threats to world security replacing the old East-West

desch. Bangladesh has to address India's serious concerns relating to perceived threat to her security. It is difficult to believe that India's foreign policy towards Bangladesh would be dictated by her likes and dislikes, if any, of the political parties of Bangladesh. Indians surely are aware that this is totally an internal matter of Bangladesh and any interference would be resisted by the people and would be totally counter productive. Delhi's South Block, peopled by pragmatists and realists, are unlikely to make such juvenile errors and would be inclined to do business with the government in power in Bangladesh.

zance of Indian concerns unless a policy of confrontation has already been decided upon. Since geography has made us India-locked our efforts should be to pursue a policy so that we are not fenced in. Nuclearised South Asia and Indo-Pak rivalry portends nothing good for the region. And policy of equidistance would not help us in the long run. ASEAN and APEC routes, if at all feasible, should not be substitutes for South Asian cooperation even if it is amputative in the short run. But at the same time it would make little sense in remaining Indocentric forced upon us by geography, when economic compulsions should encourage us to look West-

labour shortage; developing countries would have to deliver economic growth to their ever-increasing population. Jack Straw saw the US remaining the largest economy at least for the next few decades with EU, Japan and China not far behind, while the developing countries would remain mired in increasing poverty and blighted growth prospect increasing the possibility of state failures as a growing phenomenon. Finally Jack Straw perceived increased debate on political ideas and religion. Though the threat of political extremism has waned, the dangers of religious fundamentalism have grown.

The West owes, he feels, to many in the Muslim world who feel western values and secularism threatening their faith and way of life, adequate assurances to overcome their mistrust. He strongly advocated for reduction of economic inequality through aid, market liberalisation, and removal of trade barriers between the developed and the developing worlds.

Equity demands of the developing countries to respond equally to the concerns of the developed countries where North Korean truancy, for example, is an abomination to be dealt with severely albeit with caution, through the United Nations. We on our part have to continue our endeavour to bring about semblance of peace, an essential ingredient for economic development in our region. Avoidable race in defence expenditures aimed at trying to solve an insoluble problem which has aged fifty years and have gone beyond pale can only be regressive and deny the people of the region the quality of life they richly deserve.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is retired Secretary to the Bangladesh government and former ambassador.

**Economics apart our foreign policy makers will have to be in step with others relating to many UN conventions to which we have become parties but they still remain to be legislated upon. One inescapable fact of the unipolar world is that no country can escape for long international scrutiny particularly in the post Nine-Eleven era. Fight against terrorism has now become the overriding international agenda, which has to be tailored into the foreign policy structure of all countries.**

centre of world affairs and inflating its importance in the course of world events accordingly" etc (*Analyzing Foreign Policy* - Brian White). Accepting Joseph Nye's label of "state-centric realism" in which the government on behalf of the State is a unitary and monolithic actor in formulating foreign policy, often external forces rather than internal compulsions become the major determinants of foreign policy. If one were to take the most recent examples of NATO and EU expansions, one can reasonably reach the conclusion that such extra-ordinary events could not have taken place but for the end of the Cold War. At the same time a State's inherent strength both military and/or economic can help it to withstand external pressure as the Russians have so far successfully done in the

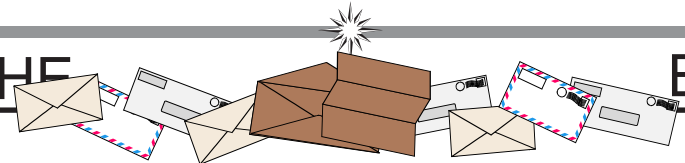
confrontation makes it imperative for countries not only to live in peace with neighbours but to make regional and/or sub-regional cooperation meaningful. One also has to be acutely aware of, however ill articulated and maligned Bush doctrine of either-you-are-for-us-or-against-us may be, that such a policy may be relevant for regional powers as well. In such cases, "big-small" states like ours have to spell out clearly their positions on contentious regional issues considered by our neighbours as vital to their national security. Sitting on the fence cannot be an eternal option nor looking for new security partners who may not turn up or be able to be of assistance at the right moment. Subservience is not being advocated nor external control of foreign policy will be acceptable to Bangla-

One also fails to understand the thesis put forward by some that India has embarked upon a deliberate policy to malign Bangladesh as a fundamentalist Islamic country. Proponents of this school of thought cite the good conduct certificate given to Bangladesh by the US. Little do they realise that Pakistan is regularly being praised by the US government for its courageous anti-Taliban/Al-Qaida role while both at the centre and NWFP and Beluchistan Islamists and pro-Taliban forces are either in power or wield formidable influence over state policies. Anti-Bush protests are regular features in Pakistani cities recently more incensed by the possibility of US led attack on Iraq. It would therefore be advisable that good conduct certificate notwithstanding we should take due cogni-

ward which will remain our largest market in the foreseeable future.

Economics apart our foreign policy makers will have to be in step with others relating to many UN conventions to which we have become parties but they still remain to be legislated upon. One inescapable fact of the unipolar world is that no country can escape for long international scrutiny particularly in the post Nine-Eleven era. Fight against terrorism has now become the overriding international agenda, which has to be tailored into the foreign policy structure of all countries. In one of his recent speeches British Foreign Secretary underlined several changing features that foreign policy framers would have to take into account. While population in developed countries would remain static with consequent

# 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.

## "Autorickshaw off the road"

I write with a feeling of shame, in response to the "Baridhara dweller" Mr. Aran Khan Anjan (January 2). I believe this man has some real nice collection(s) of car for which he calls autorickshaws as "peculiar automobiles".

I have to tell him, that autorickshaws are the vehicles of our country, every Bangladeshi was born seeing a autorickshaw and so were you. Finding them peculiar is nothing but showing pride of yourself and disgust for the poor. I think you are rich enough to compensate for the damage that they have caused, and if your vehicle is really very expensive it's all the more advisable not to use it in our country, as it is inevitable that there'll be

scratches.

Secondly I'd like to make a point, you make about private car owners being more solvent and naturally paying more tax. It is seen in our country, that it is mostly the rich people living in big areas, having big connections, are the people who evade tax, amass wealth and has no feelings for the poor people, as is seen in the tone of your letter. And by saying that government should be more concerned about the rich portrays your immaturity and lack of knowledge.

Government is for the people, people is all people irrespective of wealth, position or status. Tax is taken from the rich to bridge the gap between rich and poor and not to make rich richer and poor poorer. Finally I'd like to ask Mr. Khan, to look at the world for a few moments

through the eyes of an autorickshaw driver. You have just lost a job, you have nothing to do, no money to feed your kids, no money to send them to school, no money to feed yourself or your wife. Remember, everything is in the hands of Gods, all people of all professions should be respected, as they are the creations of God.

What you just thought for a moment could be reality, if not today maybe tomorrow, but it can happen. So learn to treat people with goodness, as should be done by a good person, by a good Muslim and by every Bangladeshi.

Amna, Ontario, Canada

I'd like to congratulate Aran Khan Anjan for speaking the bitter truth. It's true that the car owners, naturally coming from an affluent back-

ground, pay more taxes and spend a lot of money in their automobiles. So when a rickshawpuller or an auto-rickshaw driver with no knowledge of traffic rules make scratches or dents on cars, only the car owners know how it feels.

No where in the world, one would find so many ignorant (of traffic rules) people operating public transport. And please don't start with the same old story of they are poor and stuff. Poverty has nothing to do with violating traffic rules. If one wants to ply on public roads he/she must be careful of the rules and regulations. And I cannot but say that the rickshawpullers and auto-rickshaw drivers are master in violating these rules intentionally or unintentionally.

Asif Iqbal  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## City with polluters off

Dhaka City is sworn to have freed from two-stroke 3-wheeler, the most polluting vehicle plied on the roads before being banned. It had been called as "Polluter" by *The Daily Star* from years together. It was identified in such a way not only for its nature to pollute the air level the city inhabitants encounter but, I must say, to set before the concerned authority in realising its harmful effects.

Obviously it was the authorities concerned that upheld to ban the three wheeler, a spontaneous air polluter that had been emitting carbon compounds. However, Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association(BELA) with its petition to the High Court in 1995 initiated the program. In this process we, the

victims, were let to find space here to opine our views.

Tareq  
Kallyanpur, Dhaka

## Banning of tobacco ads on TV

It was a great decision on part of the Government to ban cigarette advertisement on private TV channels before 10:00 pm (December 24, 2002). The youngsters in particular will now be less affected.

We would be really happy when there will a complete ban of cigarette ads on all the TV channels. And we will be happier when the Government will ban smoking in public places.

Md. Ashequl Islam  
IBA, University of Dhaka

## Student leaders, indeed!

Our attention has been drawn to a recent news item which reports that the new leadership of the student wing of the BNP consists of individuals who have been students for the last couple of decades, well-settled in family life with wife and children, and are engaged in lucrative vocations of procurement and contracts. It is obvious that such students are atypical and cannot represent the interests of regular students. And certainly they do not contribute to healthy student politics. We have also been told that the student leaderships of other parties are no different.

If the government and the opposition are not hypocritical about fostering healthy student politics,

we suggest that they should eliminate their reliance on such professional students for the leadership of their student wings. We also suggest that, as public universities are heavily subsidised, equity demands that no individual be allowed stay in these universities beyond a maximum stipulated number of years. If they really have such an unquenched thirst for knowledge as well as adequate family resources, then these "knowledge soldiers" should be encouraged to pursue such avocation in a private or foreign university!

Panini Ahmed  
Boston, USA