

Welcome return to normality

Mechanism needed to head off trouble

THE BCL decision to call off the strike on the Dhaka University campus has put an end to the crisis that brought everything to a standstill for six days at the country's premier seat of learning.

We welcome the decision and hope that the student supporters of the two major parties will be able to avoid such deadlock in future well before the general students are forced to pay a high price for the severe disruption of campus life. The BCL leaders have said that the university authorities have agreed to meet their demands, which indeed indicates that there were fruitful talks between them and the university authorities. Obviously, the student organisations, operating under the tutelage of this or that political party, have to realise that nothing is more important than the academic issues like resumption of classes and holding of examinations on time.

The JCD has also adjusted its position on the latest outbreak of campus violence by announcing that the campus was 'open to all'. So the feuding groups have apparently found a point of convergence and have succeeded in preventing further escalation of violence. But we wonder why things were allowed to drag onto the point where the university classes and examinations couldn't be held and suddenly the campus became a place for only the political activists. Some kind of preemptive mechanism should have been there so that the trouble could be nipped before it assumed threatening proportions. A trouble-shooting arrangement comprising the teachers, students and all others concerned should be in place to ensure that students in general do not become hostage to lingering campus violence, which tends to upset all their calculations.

The crisis has been resolved after six days of nightmare, which created a state of total uncertainty on the campus. The student bodies, which represent the major parties, have to accept the truth that nobody has the right to disrupt normal functioning of the university. Similarly, the question of 'rehabilitating' the political rivals should not have arisen since the university is for all *bona fide* students.

Finally, the university campus must not be turned into a place for testing strength since the general students are badly affected when such bellicose tactics are adopted by the politically charged student bodies.

Fracas in court premises

Unbecoming of legal practitioners

IT was with disquiet and trepidation that we witnessed a most unfortunate episode of violent behaviour within the precincts of the District and Sessions Judges Court on Wednesday. It frustrated us in no uncertain terms to see lawyers getting into scuffles. Incidents like that in such a noble profession would undoubtedly be one of the most embarrassing events on record in the history of practising law in our country. Not just physical confrontation resulting in injuries, some lawyers even went to the extreme of breaking doors of courtroom. We are lost for words in condemning such behaviour.

The lawyers seemed to have got caught in the crossfire of right to boycott and right to resist. If one wants to boycott the court, then why should he be resisted from doing so? On the other hand, if such boycott makes the court dysfunctional, then one should protest it too. But why physical confrontation? How could a lawyer get to physically assaulting his peers and that also at the very place that is considered to be the seat of law? Here the practitioners of law broke the law. And what we saw in this case is that litigation interests were sidetracked especially at a time when there is a huge backlog of cases.

The sharp political division between the lawyers has contributed largely to this sordid display of disrespect for one another. It has gone to such a level that they can't even stand on one platform for safeguarding their own interests. Such hard political positioning on issues that affect the profession is simply not acceptable. It only creates uncertainty, instability and confusion. We don't expect such confrontational attitude from the lawyers simply because they are in a profession which is not only highly respected but also the last resort for those who seek justice. On a matter of principle concerning the appointment and promotion of judges, we believe that the recommendations of the Chief Justice should hold good. We recall that this practice was followed during Ziaur Rahman's presidency and Khaleda Zia's premiership earlier on.

US bi-standard

During the time of US invasion in Iraq, when Saddam Hossain administration showed snapshot of the dead US troops men to the media the US Bush administration, especially defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld was clamouring throughout the world that it was a violation of international war law. Then the Bush administration was criticised throughout the world for displaying photos of Iraqi dead bodies. And only after that the Iraqi administration started distributing the dead US troops snapshot in the media. Recently president Saddam Hossain's two sons Qusay and Uday were killed in a gun battle with the US soldiers. After their killing,

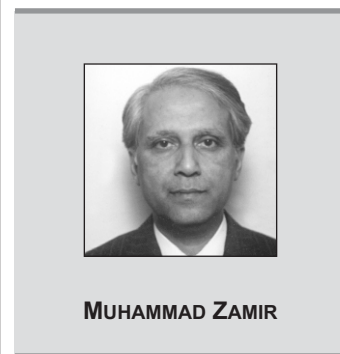
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Md. Zillur Rahman
Bangabandhu Hall, DU

How is the millionaire metre reader?

The Daily Star published a sensational report on the Titas Gas and the scrupulous metre reader Mahub. People became astonished to know that the metre reader Mahub was a leader of the Titas

The convention on the future of Europe: An assessment



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

IF the reform of the European Union has failed to match the critical challenges it faces at home and in the outside world, these failures are not primarily institutional. They rather reflect a more profound failure of political will. This has most dramatically been expressed in the policy field. Consequently, it may take the trauma of further crises for the Union's political leaders to come to terms with the scale of the institutional reform and policy development which will be required in the years ahead. Most analysts believe that while there have been a number of significant steps forward (that should be welcomed), judged against the criteria by which the Convention was established, the result has not been impressive.

It may be recalled that the Laeken Declaration acknowledged the failure of previous attempts at EU reform and set up the Convention with an open mandate. It was then clear to national leaders that the Union required a comprehensive overhaul to face up to citizens' expectation and to an evolving international context. This explicitly applied both to the institutions and to the policies of the Union.

Laeken included the four points listed in the Nice Declaration on the future of the Union -- the role of national parliaments in the EU, the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the division of competences between the Union and Member States and simplification of the Treaties -- and added many others. These included sensitive matters such as the election and size of the Commission, the rotating Council presidency, the external representation of the Union and the preservation of the institutional balance at large. Moreover, Laeken mentioned for the first time the idea of providing the Union with a fully-fledged Constitution, replacing the long string of overlapping Treaties.

It is important here to examine how the Convention has performed

in tackling these tasks? The overall assessment, is that while there have been some significant improvements, the text does not go far enough in equipping the Union to cope with the challenges ahead, as the Convention was mandated to do by Laeken.

The new Treaty contains a number of positive elements that should be welcomed. These include:

- 1. the simplification of qualified majority voting (QMV) better reflecting population;

enhanced involvement of national parliaments, but short of blocking the decision-making machinery;

- 2. the preservation of the *passerelle* clause whereby the European Council can decide, by unanimity, to extend the ordinary legislative procedure where special procedures still apply, and to replace unanimity with majority voting;
- 3. solidarity clause involving mutual assistance in a security or humanitarian crisis and

enlargement, this can be construed as imposing on the EU a suffocating straitjacket in areas of key importance;

- 4. although there is much to be said for the Union being strategically led by an effective European Council which concentrates on its leadership role -- and does not waste its time exercising the arbitrating role which the GAC so often fails to fulfil -- the establishment of the European Council as a new institution with a perma-

There are some increased powers for the European Parliament but it is the European Council and not the EP that has the decisive say on the nomination of the Commission President. The best hope is that -- despite this setback -- the European political parties will bring the issue to voters in European Parliament elections by nominating their preferred candidates for the Commission Presidency. This would certainly increase the

interpreted as an important step to foster the development of CFSP from the bottom up.

As regards enhanced cooperation in security and defence policy, three levels have been envisaged. First, there is a formula relating to crisis management operations involving some but not all Member States and acting in the name of the Union. Second, there is provision for 'structured cooperation' allowing Member States to develop stronger military capabilities and equip themselves to take on more demanding tasks. Finally there is also provision for those Member States wishing to give one another a mutual defence clause.

European analysts feel that since scope for discussion exists with regard to Part IV, including clauses for Treaty amendment, further thinking needs to be undertaken on how to abandon the requirement for unanimous national ratification. Likewise, it is being advised by many that Part III provisions related to the determining of the actual extension of majority voting across sectoral provisions need to be reconsidered.

The Convention has been an important exercise but it remains to be seen whether the proposed new role for the eurozone countries will translate into more effective economic governance with appropriate policies to strengthen the economic pillar of EMU. The reluctance to make QMV the general rule is unlikely to promote efficiency in a Union of 25 or more Member States.

The new EU Foreign Minister must also have full recourse to the Union methods including development aid, financial assistance and a strong connection to Europe's diplomatic representations abroad. European foreign policy is about understanding the "network" of policy instruments and using them coherently to further the EU's basic priorities. The Foreign Minister's role in this regard will need a closer definition.

There will also probably have to be greater scrutiny and emphasis pertaining to the importance of including the Charter on Fundamental Rights in the Union's future constitution. The Union, unfortunately, is sometimes incapable of counter-acting human rights violations in Europe. The Charter is a step in the right direction, but, as President Prodi of the European Commission has pointed out, more needs to be done.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

The Convention has been an important exercise but it remains to be seen whether the proposed new role for the eurozone countries will translate into more effective economic governance with appropriate policies to strengthen the economic pillar of EMU. The reluctance to make QMV the general rule is unlikely to promote efficiency in a Union of 25 or more Member States.

- 1. the extension of majority voting in the Council of Ministers;
- 2. the EU gaining legal personality;
- 3. the simplification of the Treaties into a single document. (This simplification is a step towards greater transparency but the institutional structures, as well as the voting system, remain too complicated for most citizens to readily understand);
- 4. the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- 5. no material diminishing of Union competence;
- 6. streamlining of the Commission;
- 7. an increased role for the European Parliament (EP), especially due to the extension of the co-decision procedure (now 'ordinary legislative procedure') and the ultimate say over all EU expenditure;
- 8. the movement of several Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) policy areas into the Community sphere;
- 9. the establishment of an EU Foreign Minister;
- 10. recognition of the Eurogroup as a separate decision making body. (The agreement to allow for the Eurozone countries to take collective decisions on economic issues and to agree on appropriate measures to ensure unified representation of the Eurozone in international organisations marks a significant advance.);
- 11. simplification of instruments and procedures. There will be

citizen's right to call upon Commission to propose legislation if 1,000,000 signatures can be obtained.

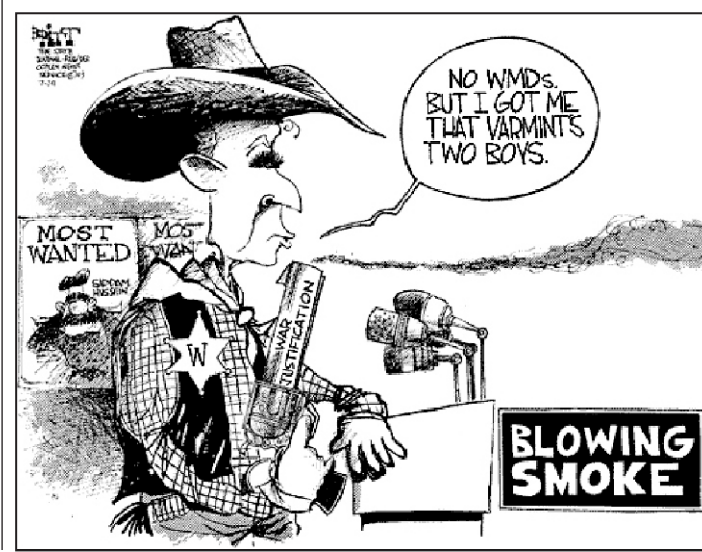
The negative and questionable points are:

- 1. the welcome extension of QMV to a number of new legal bases does not make up for the clear failure in applying some form of majority voting to common foreign and security policy (CFSP), trade policy in relation to intellectual property and services, fiscal policy, Article 1-17 on EU competences, and future revision of the Treaty. Considering the impact of

pressure on the European Council to really take into account the results of the European Parliament elections and carry out adequate consultations in making its nomination to the EP;

- 2. the failure to break the link between Commission and Member States as far as both the size of the Commission and the procedure to appoint the Commissioners are concerned and
- 3. the creation of a new post of EU Foreign Minister may prove an empty shell if the basis of decision-making remains unanimity.

It may be recalled here that an improvement in the external affairs machinery was one of the prime goals of the Convention. Laeken spoke of the Union needing to improve its external clout, a desire widely shared by EU citizens. Regrettably the Iraq conflict demonstrated vividly the disarray of the Union in foreign policy and led to a weakening of the draft articles that emerged from the Dehaene and Barmer working groups. The main change relates to the new post of EU Foreign Minister that will combine the roles currently played by the High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana and the External Affairs Commissioner, Chris Patten. Intergovernmental procedures will now continue to rule most, if not all, policy decisions. This will also mean the creation of a European diplomatic service, replacing fragmentation between the Commission's services and the Secretariat General of the Council. This may be



Matir Moyna premiere; civil liberty infringement?

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

I missed the premiere-cum-Press Show but managed to catch the first public screening of the film on 4th July at the prestigious ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) auditorium in South-West London. The film also opened the same day at the Genesis cinema in the East End and at the Barbican in Central London. At all these venues audience response was unprecedented, owing, no doubt, largely to the excellent pre-release coverage it received in the print media. A number of major papers, including broadsheets like *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* as well as magazines and tabloids like *Time Out*, *The Evening Standard* and *The Eastern Eye* carried full-page write-ups and all of them were unequivocal in their praise of the film. The review in *The Guardian*, for example, was headlined "Islam Through A Child's Eye" and the reviewer called it "definitely the film of the year."

British film-goers have had the chance to see a few other films by Bangladeshi directors before this, like Nasiruddin Yousuf's 'Ekattorer Jeshu', Tanvir Mokammel's 'Chitra Nadir Paray' and 'Lal Salu', and Shamim Akhtar's 'Ithas Konya', but they were all shown in special events such as the London Film Festival or National Film Theatre shows, whereas 'Matir Moyna' is the first Bangladeshi film to be released in the mainstream cinema in this country. And the most heartening thing is that it is attracting -- and being liked by -- people from every walk of life regardless of their racial and communal differences.

At the ICA screening which I attended, the director Tareque Masud and his wife and producer Catherine Masud were present to introduce the film and answer questions from the audience who, to say the least, were quite enthusias-

tic in their appreciation. The film had been released in Bangladesh (Dhaka), in October last year as Tareque and Catherine told me, and many readers of London Letter may already have seen it, so there is probably not much point in my dwelling on the storyline etc. They will also be aware of the strong autobiographical element inherent in the story. So far Tareque had been a maker of documentary films -- Matir Moyna is his first feature -- and I do hope a forerunner of many more to come, and as he said, because the film is based on his personal experiences as a young Madrasa

were happy too, as must have been Catherine and Tareque, at the runaway success of a film made in our own mother tongue. Since then the Genesis cinema has extended the booking for the film as it is steadily drawing more and more viewers.

There is just one more thing I would like to say in conclusion. The two principal child actors in Matir Moyna, Anu and Rokon -- Nurul Islam Bablu and Russell Farazi respectively in real life -- are simply fantastic. Bablu, I was told, used to work as a domestic help and also went to school, whereas Russell

the British Home Office has introduced a series of measures for identifying "legal migrants" to this country and checking the flow of people seeking immigration under false pretenses. The inclusion of Bangladesh, along with Sri Lanka, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, South Africa and Ukraine as "safe" countries in the recently published White List is just one such measure designed to prevent continuous violation of asylum regulations. Out of these seven countries, Sri Lanka is to be subjected to a special treatment -- from now on, Sri Lankans who wish to visit the UK through

for the integration of fingerprints (in other words, 'biometric data') into all UK passports in the not-too-distant future. This fear is compounded by the fact that the Home Office has failed to provide a clear and definitive answer to the question whether this information will be held by UK authorities alone or whether they may be shared with other intelligence services as well. If the latter happens, that will mean that sensitive data on even those people who may not be guilty of any crime or illegal activity will automatically be on the databases of more than one security agency. And a simple law of

as he explained, it will "affirm people's rights as citizens." The computerised card will store the bearer's photograph, fingerprints and personal information including name and address. The police have provisionally welcomed the scheme because they believe it would help them to do their work more effectively. A high-ranking official of the National Criminal Intelligence Service said: "An Entitlement Card could have a major impact in the prevention of certain areas of organised crime, for example, widespread benefits fraud."

On the other hand, opponents of the proposed ID card scheme, ranging from civil liberties groups to MPs, have criticised it, arguing that the scheme will be too expensive, costing the Government anything up to £3.1 billion, and also prone to fraud as well as a violation of civil liberties because it will give the State too much control over the daily lives of individuals. The Liberal Democrats Shadow Home Secretary said that his party considers it a bad idea, although they were not entirely opposed to a pilot scheme to test its feasibility. A spokeswoman for the democracy campaign group Charter 88 felt that the idea infringed upon her rights as a British citizen. "We should not need to carry a card," she said; "and have our privacy infringed on in order to affirm our rights as citizens to have use of public services like education and healthcare." There is a general feeling, however, that although the voices of dissent against the Entitlement Card may be fairly loud, they may not be loud enough to make a perceptible dent in the Labour Government's current belligerent mood.

LONDON LETTER

The two principal child actors in Matir Moyna, Anu and Rokon -- Nurul Islam Bablu and Russell Farazi respectively in real life -- are simply fantastic. Bablu, I was told, used to work as a domestic help and also went to school, whereas Russell used to be just a street urchin. Being selected for the film must have made a tremendous difference in both their lives and, understandably, it may also make it difficult for them to revert to their old ways.

student, he had to make a feature film since "one simply cannot make a documentary on one's own life."

A couple of days later, my wife and I were driving by the Genesis cinema in East London when we spotted Tareque and Catherine among the crowd of people in front of the theatre. So we stopped and went over to say Hello. There was a long line of people at the box office, most of them apparently queuing up for tickets of Matir Moyna (although a few were there for Charlie's Angels too). The Bangla film had been allocated a smaller theatre at first, but all the seats were sold out really fast with many more people clamouring for tickets. So the theatre manager decided to shift Charlie's Angels to the smaller theatre and Matir Moyna to the bigger one and everyone was happy. My wife and I

used to be just a street urchin. Being selected for the film must have made a tremendous difference in both their lives and, understandably, it may also make it difficult for them to revert to their old ways. What, now, is going to happen to them, I wonder? The RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) in Britain frequently runs a very interesting advertisement on television with the caption: "Pets are for life, not just for Christmas." I certainly don't wish to compare the two boys with pets, but somehow I feel there is a parallel of some sort here. Will the people who have the means to offer some practical assistance to these children -- Tareque and Catherine Masud included -- think about it? Curbing civil liberties by the back door? In the last few months

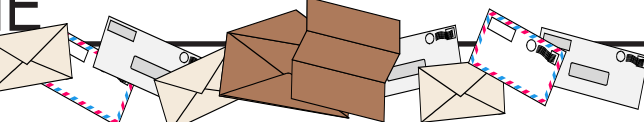
legitimate immigration routes will face a 'biometric investigation' in order to determine that they are not among those who "on or after arrival in the UK, make fraudulent asylum or immigration applications in a false identity." Put simply, this biometric investigation will require everyone applying for a UK visa from Sri Lanka to provide a record of their fingerprints which will form part of the 'biometric data' to be used for electronic vetting of the applicants.

A Home Office press release describes this measure a tool that would "help to return failed asylum seekers from Sri Lanka who destroy their documents by helping to establish their true nationality." Many civil liberties campaign groups, however, fear that this process is just a covert pre-trial run

averages means that the greater is the number of agencies holding such information, the bigger will be the chances of abuse or a breach of the confidentiality of the information t h u s r e t a i n e d .

Meanwhile, the Home Secretary David Blunkett has disclosed that plans are being devised to issue everyone living in the UK with a National Identity Card. The last time a similar scheme was in force was during World War II when all British men, women and children had been issued identity documents which were abandoned more than 50 years ago. Mr Blunkett prefers to describe his proposed ID card as an "Entitlement Card", perhaps to soften the blow of its impact on people who are suspicious of the motives behind the scheme, since,

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.

US bi-standard
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Gas Employees' Association and a close relation of one of the most powerful ministers and another MP elected from Narsingdi. The report also informed us about the multistoried buildings owned by that metre reader. Just after the publication of the reports in the Daily Star and other news dailies -- both English and Bengali, the minister concerned ordered to take immediate actions but the concerned MP elected from Narsingdi threatened the authority and eventually nothing was done. Thus the corrupt officials of the Titas Gas and the metre readers became the kings of the Titas and the 'Petro Empire'.

But we really do not know why that brilliant reporter of the Daily Star did not continue the case! It

seemed that he stopped all on a sudden. Our prime minister is always against such corruption and malpractice and it was the duty of the press to draw her personal attention. We could have saved our natural gas and thus save the nation if we could draw her personal attention.

Peerzada Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hiala Shaheb Bari, Habigonj

Bangladesh cricket team

The Bangladesh cricket team has just ended its Australia tour. In many ways, it was a great experience for the young team. Many positive features have emerged that should be taken in their right stride by the

team members, the coach and the cricket administrators. Facing the might Aussies with courage in their home ground was in itself a great achievement. The team can be proud of some good, though sporadic, batting by some of the players, excellent bowling by the opening pairs and the spinners and much-improved fielding by almost everyone.

However, apart from some gritty individual performances, the plight of the team as a whole continued throughout the tour and this was in mosty due to the failure of the captain as he could not motivate the team and infuse enthusiasm among the players. As a player, he was a dismal failure, either with the bat, the ball or in the field. I am sorry to

suggest, but he should go and make way for some other player who can deliver. With an eye to the future and taking into account the attitude, approach and current form of the players, Hannan Sarker (who has experience captaining the under-19 team) should be made the captain and Alok Kapali, his deputy. Some might raise their eyebrows on this proposal, but let us not forget that some of the most successful captains in world cricket commenced their captaincy roles at a very young age. Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi (21 years), Javed Miandad (22), Stephen Fleming (23) and now Graeme Smith (22) of South Africa have successfully led their teams to glory. Come on Banglars (as they are popularly known in Australia), it is

about time you banged in one.
Omar Khayyam
NSW, Australia

"Kamal Das Gupta: The legend lives on"

I read the above mentioned write-up of Shafin Ahmed published in your daily on July 20, 2003. It was amazing to learn about the versatile genius of Kamal Das Gupta and his contribution in enriching the musical traditions of Bengal. It is unfortunate that this legend could not be properly utilised in Dhaka during the closing years of his life.

However, my curious mind wants to know why did Kamal Das Gupta

at all came to Dhaka when Kolkata had given him so much? Why did he desert India sitting at the top of the musical horizon there? Is there anyone who can satisfy my curiosity.

MD Azizur Rahman
Liaquet Avenue, Dhaka

The bumper tragedy

I must congratulate The Daily Star on its dogged follow up of the bumper killer. It is quite a welcome change.

I am simply amazed that Abdul Awal Mintoo has so far not even made a public comment or apology regarding this matter.

MA
On e-mail