

## People want peace

All must cooperate to ensure it

SHAIKH Hasina's speech yesterday was a relief. AL's decision to extend the deadline is welcome as it postpones the immediate prospect of further political violence. We cannot condone the politics of extending ultimatum to the caretaker government. While we supported the demand for the change of CEC and the overhauling of the EC, we cannot, in any way support the recommencing of the violence we saw earlier.

There are two distinct challenges before the nation today. How to hold a free and fair election, and how to avoid bloodshed in doing so. If fact these two challenges are in fact two aspects of the same challenge. If there is violence then there cannot be any free and fair election, and if there is no free and fair election, the violence will not end.

The truth is for us to achieve that goal our two major political parties will have to show more restraint and a greater understanding of the challenges before the caretaker government. The AL must be commended for the maturity and circumspection they have shown in the last few days, which is in marked contrast to their style of politics shown earlier. The AL must continue this restraint, for nothing can be gained by violence. We would have liked AL to have condemned the barbaric killing of two political activists during their siege programme commensurate with renunciation of violence by all other parties. But that is too much to expect from our politicians. Instead we have regrettably seen heightening of threatening rhetorics from all quarters, including the former prime minister.

For us to proceed towards calmer political waters, there has to be a consensus on the changing of the CEC and reconstituting the EC. BNP is seen to be hardening its position on Justice Aziz. We would urge them not to shift from their original position when they appeared softer on the CEC. It is our view that Justice Aziz lost the moral authority to hold that constitutional post when he disregarded High Court ruling and when the Supreme Court also ruled against him. When the two highest courts of the land find cause against the CEC, how can the public in general trust him.

There is a sense of relief in the public mind. How long it will last depends really on the BNP and the AL. We urge to give us that respite.

## Costly medicare

The poor burdened further

TREATMENT at public hospitals will now be dearer and this can only be a cause of consternation for the poor. Increase of hospital charges as well as charging for medical tests that were heretofore provided free, is yet another anti-poor measure of the erstwhile coalition.

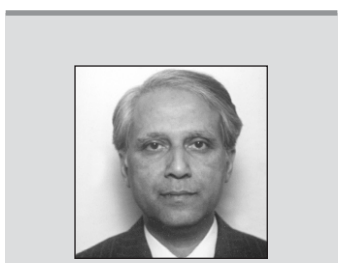
It is the poor who will be hit the hardest by the increases, particularly the abject poor who have no recourse but the free beds and the free treatment at the public hospitals that went with it so far. One can only wonder what the option of those people, who were dependent entirely on the state, would be? The rationale of increasing the costs of treatment at public hospitals defies comprehension.

Public hospitals have so far been a redeeming feature in the otherwise scant services provided by the state, particularly to the poor, where they could at least expect some relief for their health problems, and where their healthcare needs were addressed to, in whatever little way that was possible through providing free treatment. Mere profit and loss should not be the criterion of running these hospitals. It would be well to remember that our public hospitals had been providing welfare service to the extremely poor, that had nowhere but these hospitals to go to.

Even for the middle class, public hospitals have been the only option that has now been made costlier since charges on certain items have also been enhanced. The mushrooming of private hospitals is of little help with charges so exorbitant that makes it out of reach even for the middle class of the society.

However, one cannot but also query why was the issuance of the order regarding this matter being treated in a secretive manner, issuing after almost a fortnight of it being signed and announcing only at the fag end of the tenure of the BNP-Jamaat coalition govt? Certainly the government of the day was aware that it would not go down well with people.

To a very large number of our people public hospitals are the only sources of succor for their medical problems. We suggest that the government seriously reconsider the matter and rescind the order.



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

READERS will recall the eerie uncertainty that had gripped the nation on 28 October. Violence was the order of the day. Amidst all the vivid media coverage came the news that the former Prime Minister had urged the Opposition, in the early afternoon, to accept whatever decision the President should take with regard to the appointment of the Chief of the Caretaker Government. The BNP Chairperson was addressing members of her Party in Noya Paltan, Dhaka.

The evening before she had met the President after her long speech telecast live to the nation. The whole of 28 October saw perfunctory meetings between the President and several political leaders. These discussions were ostensibly undertaken to review various possibilities and alternative choices with regard to the appointment of the next Chief of the Caretaker Government. While politicians talked, violence hit the streets of Dhaka and other parts of the country.

It was mentioned the next morning, the 29th October, that Awami League and the BNP had failed to agree on the implementation process related to the constitutional provisions present in Article 58C (3) and (4). The media also reported that the President had proposed that in accordance with the provision of Article 58C (6), he was ready to take on the responsibilities of Chief of the non-party

Caretaker Government in addition to his duties as President of the Republic. It was also announced in the media that the President in the course of the day would be meeting representatives of several political parties.

We witnessed critical reactions from several constitutional experts in the electronic media. They were universal in terming the President's proposal as being a violation of the Constitutional process. The Awami

telephone call was received by the personal office of the Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina informing that an invitation card was on its way so that she could attend the oath taking ceremony of the new Chief of the Caretaker Administration at 8pm. Her personal staff continued to wait for the card. It did not arrive on time. This stopped Hasina from being present in the oath taking ceremony. Her office was also not informed as to

relegation of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's role within the Bangladesh historical process. The second apprehension relates to his physical ability to discharge the additional duties. On more than one occasion, we have been reminded of his frail health. Can he, in this context, bear the punishing life-style that will be expected of him during the Caretaker period? Will he then be forced to delegate some of the important complex

aged under Article 58C (6). A and B having failed, C has been put in place. A date-expired medicine has been poured into a new bottle, ready for use by the poor patient.

Nevertheless, one must admit that the Awami League and the Fourteen Party leadership have shown great pragmatism and patience in the manner in which they have reacted to the President's decision. They have taken public interest and the econ-

convene the Supreme Judicial Council. If that solves the problem, let that be done. Similarly, measures need to be taken to correct the voters list, to cancel the recent political appointments of hundreds of politicised, partisan upazila election officers and guarantee the use of transparent ballot boxes during the polls. This will enhance credibility within the electoral process. Secondly, she has stressed the need for the Caretaker Administration to create a level playing field by ensuring that the government owned media, radio and TV channel give equal publicity (in terms of time and opportunity) coverage to the efforts of the different political parties. Thirdly, she has pointed out that it should be made clear to the law enforcement agencies and the armed forces that partisanship will not be tolerated -- not only with regard to detention of political activists but also in the recovery of unlicensed arms.

As Chief Adviser, the President has initiated some purging at the top -- a welcome step. However, this eradication of partisan influence has to be done on a comprehensive basis at the union level. The District Administration has been totally politicised and needs to be cleaned.

The President has to remember that he is not just a person. He is an institution which will continuously be under public scrutiny. He has to restore confidence and create the necessary environment for guaranteeing a constructive, free and fair electoral process. The Opposition as well as the people on the street will be watching. So will the rest of the world. The nation has given him a chance to be part of history. He along with his Advisers must seize this opportunity.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador who can be reached at mzamir@dhaka.net

## POST BREAKFAST

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League, consistent with this view, urged the President to follow the constitutional process as envisaged in the provisions present in Article 58C(3) and (4). It was also underlined that the steps required under this format were obligatory and did not require consensus or consultation. They were self-evident. It was also mentioned that the President would have to consider the provision present in Article 58C(5) which required consultation (in case sub-section 3 and 4 could not be implemented) and related to the choosing of a Chief Adviser from among citizens of Bangladesh who are qualified to be appointed as Advisers under this Article.

Unfortunately, none of these steps were followed. The constitutional process was disregarded and flimsy excuses provided for the course of action undertaken later on in the evening of 29 October. Strangely, there was only silence from our vocal civil society.

The subsequent course of events on that evening was equally disappointing. At around 6.30pm a

who was going to be sworn in. This was indeed surprising. Probably, certain interested quarters felt the need to be secretive about this controversial decision to ensure a quiet transition.

The swearing in of the President as the Head of the Caretaker Administration was meant to deliver a powerful message to the bureaucrats and the law enforcement personnel. In a manner of speaking, it was indirectly underlined and reiterated that the BNP, in another form, was still in charge, and that, they should not hesitate in providing covert support, if required later.

The measure undertaken by the President has quite justifiably raised many questions. The first concern is whether he will be able to rise over partisanship. A BNP replacement, for another politician with an independent streak, he has over the last few years demonstrated his steadfast support for the BNP Alliance. In this context, as a reflection of his loyalty, he allowed in his speeches, the persistent

functions expected of him to an administrative arrangement that has been pre-fixed through election engineering? This is particularly worrying given the large number of hasty promotions and postings by the BNP alliance government before the end of their term of office.

From the very beginning the previous government has apparently stacked the deck against a free and fair election. Now the last card has been played.

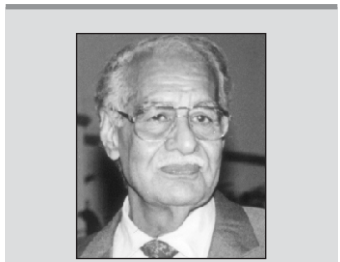
Option A started with the controversial decision to increase the age of retirement for judges. That was to ensure that Justice KM Hasan would be the first choice for the next Chief of the Caretaker Government. Option B was appointing Justice Aziz as the Chief Election Commissioner, knowing full well that he would retire at the end of September as a Judge of the Appellate Court, and consequently be a claimant in the line of appointment as Chief of the Caretaker Administration. Option C was availing of the provision as envis-

aged under Article 58C (6). A and B having failed, C has been put in place. A date-expired medicine has been poured into a new bottle, ready for use by the poor patient.

Nevertheless, one must admit that the Awami League and the Fourteen Party leadership have shown great pragmatism and patience in the manner in which they have reacted to the President's decision. They have taken public interest and the econ-

omy to hear, and for the moment, refrained from solving this controversy in the streets. However, such constructive engagement can only continue for some time. The ball is now truly in the court of the President and the Chief Adviser. He has to prove that he is neutral and that he can rise over narrow vested interests. He also has to take many difficult steps that might not endear him to his sponsors.

## How to allay India's fears?



KULDIP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

Abdullah's son was a minister in the Union government, while Mufti has been the Central Home Minister.

Lately, both Abdullah and Mufti have been bizarre in their pronouncement as if they are trying to gain the ground which they had lost to their opponents. Their statements are whimsical. They do not seem to realise that they lose their credibility still further when they attack India. For example, Abdullah has criticised New Delhi for the

whether he pleased the Kashmiris but he disappointed his admirers at Delhi and elsewhere. It is difficult to say what will be the fate of Afzal. I, for one, have argued that capital punishment should be abolished. But so long as India does not do that the fate of Afzal will depend on the President of India. Yet, for Abdullah to say that India would go up in flames if Afzal was hanged shows that he does not appreciate the inherent

UN to present a case for Kashmir's self-rule. He should know by this time that the fate of Kashmir cannot be decided at the UN. Even Pakistan realises this. It is India's parliament which has to vote on whatever the settlement. Mufti should have begun with the Indian parliament which he has served for many years as a member. His speech at the UN, if at all delivered, may get a mention in a few newspapers. But how

the Sheikh could not regain the old affection of the Kashmiris. Abdullah and Mufti have not spent even a day in jail. Although they have expressed disappointment over the pace of agreement on Kashmir, they are essentially pro-establishment men who even when angry are not taken seriously. Now that the talks between Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan are to begin, Abdullah and Mufti can play a role, not by

part of Kashmir plus the northern areas the same powers and the status which the Kashmir on the Indian side enjoys. They too should have all subjects except foreign affairs, defence and communications. The LoC can be converted into a soft border to make it irrelevant for the people of Jammu and Kashmir and those in Kashmir and northern parts under Pakistan. Why should President General Pervez Musharraf put emphasis on the joint control of certain subjects? It is for people living in the two Kashmiris to decide. Islamabad should first remove the military brass from Kashmir on its side and transfer to it the same powers that New Delhi has done. Any other arrangement between New Delhi and Islamabad will amount to putting the cart before the horse.

In the same way, any talk on the settlement of Kashmir will be putting cart before the horse if Islamabad does not allay the fears in India that the ISI has planned to disintegrate the country. Probably, the authorities are exaggerating the ISI reach for covering up their shoddy performance against terrorists. Yet the gunmen in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu with the Pakistani passports cannot be all made up. Islamabad should welcome any proof instead of holding on to the phrase used by the India's National Security Adviser that the evidence was weighty but was not clinching.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**Any talk on the settlement of Kashmir will be putting cart before the horse if Islamabad does not allay the fears in India that the ISI has planned to disintegrate the country. Probably, the authorities are exaggerating the ISI reach for covering up their shoddy performance against terrorists. Yet the gunmen in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu with the Pakistani passports cannot be all made up. Islamabad should welcome any proof instead of holding on to the phrase used by the India's National Security Adviser that the evidence was weighty but was not clinching.**

death penalty to Mohammed Afzal Guru that the Supreme Court of India has endorsed. He has warned that India would "go up in flames" and that the terrorists would destroy relations between the Hindus and the Muslims.

I am aware that Abdullah's rhetoric gets better of him. Many years ago, I complained to Sheikh Abdullah about his son's speech at Aligarh. The Sheikh himself was worried because he had decided to nominate him as his successor. True, Abdullah has matured a lot since. But he still gets carried away by sudden spurts of emotion, as it happened on a TV network the other day. I do not know

strength of his own country. Similarly, the pluralistic society of ours, however wanting, is not so weak that its fate is dependent on Afzal. I wish the leaders would not bring in relations between Hindus and Muslims in every discussion. Abdullah's outburst has his son's decision to withdraw from all the sub-groups and the committee discussing the future of Kashmir following Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Srinagar. How does this help the situation? Abdullah's future is intertwined with the outcome of deliberations at these committees.

Take Mufti. He is going to the

does that make any difference? Mufti's party is sharing power at Srinagar. If he believes so strongly about his proposition of self-rule, he should threaten to walk out of the coalition if it is not accepted. But it is more than a coincidence that he should begin talking about the self-rule as soon as his two-and-a-half year-term ends and the Congress Chief Minister steps in. The problem with both Abdullah and Mufti is that they have no hard and fast view on Kashmir. They are trying their best to come back into reckoning in the state. But they cannot easily rub off their pre-establishment image. Even after spending 12 years in Indian jails,

criticising New Delhi but making it understand that the valley remains alienated to the last person due to human rights violations. They can never take the place of Yasin, Shabir or Mirwaiz. But they can say that Jammu and Kashmir joined the Indian Union on the understanding that the state would be supreme in all matters, except foreign affairs, defence and communications and that New Delhi has usurped other subjects. The decision to give more subjects to New Delhi depends on the state which joined the Union, not the other way round. Islamabad has yet a long way to cover. It must give to its

## OPINION

## Live and let live

UMERR MUHAMMAD ALAMGIR

THE news was like this -- "Wameek Ahmed, a meritorious architect, who is severely affected by kidney damage is still willing to producing his long cherished model plan of an ideal village of Bangladesh. The village, vibrant with poetry, art and culture, hospitality and kinship has everything there to reflect the theme of Bangladesh." The news is, no doubt, very moving, and I really don't know what will happen to his dreams as he needs substantial financial support for his health to recover, according to the news. Wameek is no exception. Every year many people from Bangladesh get affected with

severe diseases, and very few among them can avoid advertising in the "appeal for help" column in the newspaper. We, the readers, never know what happens in such a situation, and I personally don't think that all of these people get a proper response from the concerned authorities.

I have a plan to share with the readers which may be a solution to the problem. If 140 million people could donate at least one taka per month throughout a year it would be a big heap of money after one year. However, to collect charity and then distribute it to the seek is not my proposal, because this money will be exhausted one day. We need a "money generating machine" which will give

money to the sick. For this, what is needed is to collect money to establish some money generating thing like a theme park, a shopping complex, or a private university etc. which will produce a lot of profit. It's that simple! People could also be encouraged to donate as much as they can, and they should be made aware that even a little amount would have a great impact, otherwise their health could not be ensured. This fact should be impressed upon them with awareness raising propaganda through radio, television, poster, and cinema with interesting and persuasive advertisements, while also incorporating moral, cultural and spiritual motivation.

About questions regarding feasibility, money collecting booths can be placed in the corner of shopping malls/shopping centres, and big groceries in cities and villages may be assigned the responsibility as the custodians for the safety of the booth and the money. In fact, I think, some organisation related with human development can undertake the responsibility, with the collaboration of the government. These organisations may supervise the custodian shops periodically. About the safety measure, a pool consisting of a group of people can be set up whose members, apart from the members of mentioned organisation, would have a secret code number to unlock and

lock the booths. The booths may be brought periodically to a regional centre where they would be opened in presence of the authority of the programme who would also keep a record of the money collected. However, a small portion from the acquired money may go to the custodian, the pool, and the organisation to meet the management cost.

Let's make the calculation simple and easy for the readers. If our investment from shareholders throughout the country is fifteen crore taka, and we take it for granted that our profit is four crore, then three crore may go to the people (shareholders) and organisers (as well as their partners) as dividend and profit,

and the rest one crore taka will be there for the affected people! However, we should keep in mind that this plan is hypothetical. As shares have resale value people can get back the complete return, and even more than that. And this plan is geared not only towards the sick people. The fruits of this programme can be shared by many others, like the family which has been ruined by natural calamity, or whose only earning family member has been killed in a terrorist attack. The significant contributors, or donors (at least 50 taka or more), can be given a coupon, and for the latter plan (modified one) the appreciable number of

shareholders can be given the preference of getting medical service or other facilities.

The organisation, however, must think of deriving minimal profit from each share, and providing less of dividend, but, ultimately, none of the initiators, or the shareholders, would be washed-out as there would be a huge big market stretched across the country. As for the health issue, there will be a tremendous response and significant profit can be gained.

Admittedly, the story at the onset of this writing was apocryphal (untrue), and was intended to galvanise the readers into reading the article, and to think through something constructive while

going through it. Finally, I would like to take the readers few years back with an incident about Amit, a youngster who suffered from severe illness, and we saw that people came through with spontaneous charity and they set up an unprecedented example of their heartfelt emotion. I am sanguine the same response that we saw for Amit can be achieved here from our tender hearted people if it is properly publicised. We can hope that someone will embark upon this programme to help make the promised land which will ensure health for everyone.

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