

## Returning Home, Hopefully

We are heartened at the renewed prospect of repatriation of the 2.5 lakh stranded Pakistanis. We commend the initiative taken by the Jeddah-based humanitarian organisation Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami. Dr Abdullah Omar, Chief of Rabita, informed the press on arrival in Dhaka on Wednesday that repatriation would start soon, and that assessment for logistics was underway. The most important aspect of Dr Omar's visit is that it follows on from his sojourn in Pakistan. While there, the Rabita chief was able to push Pakistan a few steps further in making good their August 13 promise of taking back all the stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh.

It is wise of the Pakistani PM to decide not to settle these people in Sind and Beluchistan. Already the presence of the so-called 'Mohajirs' (as the people who migrated to the then Pakistan following the partition of 1947 are called in the 'land of the Two Nation Theory') in these two provinces have led to ethnic clashes which, in the recent past, have become extremely violent. The new plan to settle the stranded Pakistanis in the 32 provinces of Punjab has, at least, the merit of being able to provide these unlucky people with a secure home, if not their cultural milieu.

It must be said, and said in no uncertain terms, that Pakistan's policy regarding their stranded citizens in Bangladesh has been unprincipled, immoral, and in contravention of the humanitarian norms that is the hall mark of our civilization. After our liberation in 1971, Pakistan took time in acknowledging whether or not these migrant Muslims from India were citizens of Pakistan. Once having agreed to that, the haggling began as to how numerous were they. And finally, last August, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, to his credit, faced up to his country's moral responsibility and agreed to take all of the 2.5 lakh citizens of his country, stuck up here for the last two decades.

Two decades! It is this passage of time that is perhaps the most tragic aspect of the plight of these stranded Pakistanis. For twenty years, 1971-1991, these people have been living—by choice, as they voluntarily opted for Pakistan—in these make-shift camps. The youth of 20 then, are now middle-aged men/women of 40. A young man of 20 today is one who has been born, and has lived since then, only in refugee camps. And all this for having worked for the country—Pakistan—that they thought was their own.

Many times in the past, the prospect of possible repatriation rekindled a hope in the hearts of these people who have been betrayed by their government, abandoned by their fellow citizen and made destitute by fate. We only pray that the renewed hope that is now being raised as a result of the initiative of the Rabita, does not meet the fate that previous such moves did. While we wish the new initiatives all success, it is not clear whether the UN High Commission for Refugee—UNHCR—which has been involved with this problem from the very outset, has been brought into the scene. We are not also certain as to how actively the Bangladesh authorities have been involved in making a success of this new initiative. For too long these people have suffered the humiliation of living in another's country, and for too long has Bangladesh been made to bear the burden of looking after them. Let them go home, even if it is twenty years too late.

## Silly Move against Jatra, Circus etc

Government has by a recent directive required the district administrations to get clearance from the Home Ministry before they allow the holding of fairs, exhibitions and circus shows. The directive brings jatra performances in line with those three and imposes this further impediment on the promotion and development of our most glorious form of folk theatre.

If the restriction on jatra is ridiculous, the attempt to discourage circus shows and fairs and exhibitions are no less silly. Fairs or 'mela' are the best form of rural celebrations or observances of auspicious days coming down from hoary past and are integral part of our social life of which we can feel both nostalgic and proud. The 'mela' has a very important economic function besides the above. It is the year's best and biggest market place for any neighbourhood. Why should this be discouraged—and can it be really discouraged?

In the case of both fairs and circus shows the government should indeed have taken upon itself to take special measures to develop and promote them. Kerala and Bengal of the British Indian times were the two most important centres supplying circus players as also the circus companies that could compete with the world's best. This form of pure entertainment based on the best traditions of athletic skill, the ultimate in human body balance and innovations in performances and presentations of spectacles—can even now be raised to take a place of pride in the list of our national achievements, if only appropriate patronage and enthusiasm were there. The government, very evidently, is moving in the opposite direction. Why?

Exhibitions are also to face restriction. The word should have been put within quotes in the government directive. For it is in a very specialised and narrow sense the government has used it to mean a newer kind of 'mela'—developed by government departments and district or sub-divisional administrations over past many decades. Why is government moving so strongly against one of its very own special creations?

The answer to all this is rather plain albeit a little bizarre. All the four very important traditional social entertainments have somehow come to represent some of the very worst among our social evils such as gambling and swindling the public in a big way and exhibitionistic exploitation of the female body in the name of songs and dances or acting or circus playing. Even if one grants that indeed these forms have been contaminated, for sheer survival's sake, by degrading elements that cannot be allowed to pass, it would be downright foolish to harm the main forms themselves. One cannot also miss the very pertinent question of the so-called degeneration of these forms of performances and presentations has all through the process been presided directly over by the district and such other administrations. It is the people in authority at these levels that must be taken to task and not the forms and their performing companies involving not only tradition and achievement but also many skilful people who depend on these.

# Democratic Behaviour Needed for Sustenance

by Tafazzal Hussain

**F**OLLOWING the presidential election the country now has a fully democratic parliamentary government accountable to the people. Now the task ahead is stupendous. I do not however, refer to the government's political programme and implementation thereof. What I mean is that we have to build up our hard-earned democracy on the correct lines. Our future conduct and behaviour as citizens of a democratic society must be such as will be conducive to healthy growth of a true democratic political system. We have to create sound conventions and see that they take roots. The written constitution is there, which by itself may have been worded and phrased as one of the best in the world. This is not enough. In fact, it does not signify anything that really matters. What is most important is that we must be determined to work it successfully in actual practice. There has to be a will to do it, not only on the part of the ruling party, but also on the part of those who are now in the opposition.

power. And then again the party or parties coming into power shall be accountable to the people. This can only happen if we develop such practices and conventions as will facilitate the smooth transfer of power. It is, therefore, to the interest of both ruling and opposition parties to sustain a healthy democratic tradition.

But the above objective can never be achieved if parties in opposition oppose the ruling party just for opposition's sake. It is not difficult to find loopholes in the framing of legislative enactments. It is the moral obligation of every genuine political party and, in fact, every citizen to point out mistakes or shortcomings of a substantial nature of any action of the Treasury Bench and if their arguments are convincing, the government is expected to correct itself without hesitation. This is how a healthy tradition can grow. If the ruling regime listens to good advice or admits its mistakes, it will have proved its worth.

### Democratic Culture

The noted political scientist, Prof. Emajuddin Ahmed of Dhaka University called upon the political parties in course of a 'lecture series' recently held at the National Press Club to cultivate a 'democratic culture' for making the parliamentary democracy of the country a success. He said that creation of something of a high standard was difficult, but it

### Tolerance

The essence of democracy is tolerance. The ruling party has to prove that they have the best 'programme' to tackle the problems and woes of the people. If they do not succeed, the people may throw them out and the party or parties in opposition may be voted to

was easy to undo it and that in the parliamentary system, the responsibility of the opposition in building up the nation was no less than that of the government.

Leaders and thinkers of all shades of the community who participated in the seminar shared the same view. These observations at the present moment of political transition are very important and of far-reaching significance.

### Justice Shahabuddin

Everyone knows that the country had passed through a traumatic experience during the most difficult time prior to Justice Shahabuddin's appearance on the scene on December 6, 1990. Political wisdom of all parties, students and people who were in the national movement steered us through those critical days successfully. The autocratic Ershad regime bowed down to the united national movement and parted with power on the basis of a jointly agreed blueprint between major political alliances. Elections were held throughout the country, freely and fairly, on February 27, '91. A sovereign parliament was installed with option either to retain the existing presidential form or to vote for a parliamentary government fully accountable to the people. Here again political wisdom pre-

valled. Parliament chose the latter course and, in consequence, the 12th Amendment of the Constitution was passed overcoming all impediments in the way. We, however, remember that the major hurdle was a discordant voice expressed by the main opposition leader even after the special Select Committee of the parliament unilaterally passed the draft bill presented by the Treasury Bench, with jointly agreed amendments. At this crucial juncture, the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin intervened. The intervention proved effective and forces of parliamentary democracy triumphed. The Acting President Justice Shahabuddin at the very outset desired to go back to his old position of Chief Justice on completion of his assigned task and to facilitate this, the 11th Amendment was also passed in the parliament on common consent. It was all possible through a spirit of accommodation—a process of 'give and take'—on the part of both ruling and opposition parties.

### Form of Government

The last but not the least item to be completed in the chain of action leading to a full parliamentary form of government was the election of the country's ceremonial and titular head of state, the Pres-

dent. It was agreed on a consensus basis that the election procedure of the president under the new system would be determined by an Act of Parliament and not through a constitutional amendment. The Presidential Election Act was accordingly passed by a simple majority of votes in the parliament. This had better been accepted by all political parties in a patriotic spirit in the absence of any genuine broad-based consensus on this issue. However, this did not happen and two candidates, one sponsored by ruling BNP and the other by the major opposition party, the Awami League, were placed. There was a contest and the BNP candidate won, with most of the opposition parties, except the Awami League, abstaining. In the meantime, the ruling party made an unfortunate mistake in issuing an Ordinance amending the relevant Presidential Election Act to guard against any possible defection in course of voting process of the titular Head of State. But they promptly corrected their mistake by withdrawing the amending ordinance in due deference to the popular sentiment. This however, should not be regarded as their weakness, but rather as a bold step, setting a healthy precedence of true democratic practice on the part of the government. Sound democratic practices also demand that all political parties, including opposition parties,

should accept the electoral verdict in good grace.

### Through Troubled Time

The completion of all steps leading to the formation of a full parliamentary system of government is an eloquent testimony to the well-intentioned commitment and strong determination of the man who steered the country through its most troubled time of transition from autocracy to democracy. This unimpeachable character without any lust for power and position will go down as an unparalleled example in the constitutional history of Bangladesh.

Justice Shahabuddin, as Acting President, helped the political parties in coming to a consensus when this was badly needed, but kept himself aloof from political bickerings all through.

In conclusion it may be stressed once again that this hard-earned democracy has to be carried on through achievements, economic or otherwise, without or overcoming hindrances whatsoever, to the ultimate benefit of the people. And for that what seems essential is continuation of democratic behaviour by both the government and the opposition and all others concerned as well as the people at large.

The writer is former Secretary, Government of Bangladesh

**S**TOCKHOLM — "Market and morality: that's the wish of the voters," commented Hans Zetterberg, the chief ideologist of the winning Conservative Party on the results of the Swedish parliamentary elections, in which the Social Democrats got the lowest figure (38 percent) since 1928.

The loss of the Left resulted from serious credibility gaps in three essential areas: the equity of welfare programmes, foreign policy and the environment.

The Social Democrats were in government for 53 of the last 59 years. They were ousted from office by a very strong gust of right-wing wind (up 15 percent), which also brought another two new conservative parties into the parliament. The Greens, meanwhile, which in 1988 fielded the first new party candidates to enter the parliament in 70 years—didn't make it at all this time.

Will all these changes mean the death of the Swedish model? Or is it just a confirmation of a death that happened earlier? And if so, why?

Popular explanations are the international individualist trend, exhausting governmental responsibilities and an economic situation difficult to handle, especially for a minority government. But the Social Democrats have generally ruled the country from a minority position, and they have now been in office for a mere nine-year stretch, compared with an earlier 44 years.

Apart from the general individualist trend—which includes consumerism supported by commercial interests and the international media industry—the root causes should probably be looked for in other areas. Top priorities among the electorate were economy, hospital care and taxes, and these issues are closely related, even if not always in the way many seem to take for granted.

This year's election result goes back to, at least, 1976, when the then three non-socialist parties—the Moderates, the Liberals and the Centre Party—gained the majority. For six years they al-

## Sweden's Farewell to Welfare?

The electoral defeat of the Swedish Left, if rightly understood by the party leadership, may reinforce rather than weaken traditional leftist values and pave the way for a more advanced and developed "Swedish model", writes *Bernt Jonsson*, director of Sweden's Life and Peace Institute.

ternated between governing and splitting. This ended in a huge budget deficit, which was then credited to political incompetence and mismanagement.

The results of this may, however, be interpreted in a totally different manner. A gigantic budget deficit restricts the political agenda and minimises the freedom of action of politicians. The democratic leadership in the society is consequently weakened.

The outcome is more freedom and power to the economic powers-to-be, a development very much in line with conservative thinking.

An early electoral defeat by the conservatives may even serve a longer-term strategy. Their adversary has to be seen as the cause of the undermined role of democratic political power.

Furthermore, the deficit also goes well with the long-term ideological offensive, launched with consistency and a lot of money in the early 1970's by the Swedish Employers Association (SAF). The SAF has been very successful. Their conception and understanding of society have penetrated the media. In the late 1980's and early 1990's Swedes were being told by media that "the market doesn't like it" or "the market reacted favourably", as if the market was a person with feelings and emotions—or even a god to adore. In the heyday of the yuppies, the golden calf was no doubt seen among them.

In fact, however, the deregulation of the economic sphere in the name of growth made the Swedish economy vulnerable to financial speculation, and the economic success of the early 1980's turned sour. Political means were reduced to almost nil, and socio-economic engineering—cleverly performed earlier within the Swedish market economy—was made very difficult, if not impossible.

As the speculation made a few people very rich, the restrictive budgetary policy caused problems for weaker groups in the society (e.g. long queues for advanced surgical operations), even if the welfare programmes in general was not threatened. The very much needed tax reform favoured those with a high income while those with a low income continued to lag behind.

This resulted in a credibility gap for the Social Democrats on the traditional left-right scale. The adherents were disappointed, frustrated and confused, and people who lose their sense of direction could end up anywhere—even among the extreme right (experience does not confirm the popular theory about people voting according to their own enlightened self-interest).

If one aspect of the Swedish model has been the welfare state and a relatively fair (if not equal) distribution of wealth, the other has been the active foreign policy of the Social Democratic profile—raising a voice even against the superpowers and acting as a bridge-builder between East and West and North and South.

After the killing of Olof Palme, much of this disappeared, not due to conscious decision but rather to lack of initiative. Justice and peace issues have to be the heart and soul of the party, or much of the inspiring vision is lost.

Consequently, the appeal of Third World groups, the peace movement and other non-governmental organisations—including those groups within

the labour movement which are strongly committed to international issues (youth, women, Christians)—has faded dramatically. Arms export scandals and government muzzling concerning the port call issue (banning visits by nuclear-capable ships), together with a fortune spent on a new fighter plane, has added to the dissatisfaction and disillusioned.

Furthermore, the Social Democrats have not been able to develop a new strategy in international politics based on the opportunities given by developments in Central and Eastern Europe. The Paradox is that there are now more neutral and non-aligned countries in Europe than ever, but their political influence is at an all-time low. One explanation for this might be the Common Market.

The Social Democrats have been obsessed during the late 1980's by the Swedish relationship to the Common Market. At the same time they have unintentionally invited the moderates with their leader Carl Bildt into the arena of foreign policy, which was earlier characterised by a social democratic hegemony.

Europe—interpreted in fact as Western Europe—has for a long time been a favourite theme among conservatives. By changing the focus of foreign policy to Western Europe and economic relationships and by diminishing the importance of active neutrality, the Social Democrats have paved the way for a conservative competition in the foreign policy arena, a major strategic mistake from a political point of view.

Environment is the third area in which the Social Democrats have lost sym-

pathisers. It could with good reason be argued that this is unfair. The government has made a very ambitious programme to improve the ecological balance in society, but one could always ask for more. The crucial thing, though, is that they have not dared to really challenge the automobile industry (i.e. Volvo and Saab) and the car drivers ("a car is freedom"—a general conviction held even in a standstill traffic queue). They soiled their image further with an unpopular rail-road policy.

Politics is partly reality, partly symbolic acts, and the latter may be more real to the voters than the former. When the government decided to lay down the railway traffic in the more thinly populated areas and to build a combined car

and railway bridge between Sweden and Denmark (instead of a railway tunnel), the symbolism was perhaps more devastating than the actual environmental effects (which we will know only later).

The Social Democrats—earlier accused of being a party of concrete—could not afford to make this symbolically wrong choice if it was to protect its ecological credibility. Votes and commitment were consequently lost.

Considering these credibility gaps in these three major political areas, the five percent electoral loss in minor. If the party leadership reads it correctly, the voters are pointing in the direction of a Social Democratic Party more committed to socialism, the environment and social welfare than in the past decade—as well as to a new and more advanced "Swedish model".

What then about market and morality, the wish of the voters, according to the conservative ideologist? Ask the inhabitants of the Third World about their experience. The more market, the less justice in the rat race, in which only the survival of the fittest is promised.

## OPINION Youths and Unemployment

Md Atiqul Karim

The necessity to turn our vast youth-force into a potential human resource has been acutely felt in the aftermath of the observance of National Youth Day recently. We came to know after a long time that the number of country's jobless youths now ranges between 70 and 80 lakh although the unofficial figure will be much more. I still remember, by the end of the First Five-Year Plan (1973-78) the number of unemployed youths was shown as only eight lakh.

It is true that the scope of employment is indeed scarce. Having obtained a college or university degree, a large number of youths are seen moving frantically in search of jobs. Trying vigorously, if any of them chances to get an employment, the office atmosphere may not always be helpful or favourable for him/her to continue the same for long with virtually no fault of his/her own. In cases, ill-feeling, anger, hatred etc. among some of his/her colleagues may vitiate the normal work atmosphere, not the unfavourable attitude of the employer(s). This is a common picture in many of the government, autonomous or private organisations in this country vis-a-vis corruption, favouritism or nepotism of any kind only to the detriment of employment situation and genuine hardship of a good number of really deserving or resourceful persons.

The reasons for not being able to get a good job despite qualities are manifold. What I sarcastically feel is that a particular course for imparting training in 'flattery' and 'adulation' should be introduced in varsity curriculum to cope with the challenges of practical life! I have seen on occasions, that persons well-groomed in the art of flattery need not wait long to build up their career in any 'profession'. Those who lack in such a quality are seldom counted in any institution in spite of sound academic background. It is conscience that precludes them to lapse into evils; perhaps, the only draw back in life to be late in the race.

honest, dedicated and hard-working employees are not cared in some organisations. They are not also considered the actual privileges they deserve. Sometimes, lucrative positions are filled not by high-rating candidates but by those who are far inferior! This is a prime reason of frustration among the potential youths, in protest of which they have to give up jobs—simply broadening the unemployment scenario.

We have stepped into the 21st year of achieving independence. But the irony is that nothing fruitful has been done to combat the unemployment problem. The chances of absorption in government services are not worth-mentioning. One has to qualify the BCS cadre examination to get a suitable job amid lots of uncertainties. Moreover, the number of candidates selected through this system is exceedingly small because such examinations are sometimes treated as 'process of elimination' again to the deprivation of a large number of youths. Thus, repeated failure to get an employment or leaving the same on account of adverse circumstances impel many to start 'business' singly or with partners. But excepting very few, most of them fail to shire here also, for want of capital, coordination and understanding etc.

Frustration arising out of joblessness is a vital reason of crimes. Most of the offenders nabbed by police are found in their teens or twenties. However, it reflects a ray of hope that the government has been able to realise that 'youths are the architects of the future' as iterated through observance of National Youth Day. At the moment, efforts should be made to create more job opportunities through capital formation, if necessary from outside the country. And with the setting up of more needed industries and expansion of utility services the problem of unemployment can be solved to a great extent, if justice is allowed to play its role in the recruitment as well as sustenance of deserving incumbents.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Debt relief

Str "... what a relief it is!" This is some relief... first of its kind to an Asian state... best one for LDC Bangladesh to date... and an unprecedented gesture from the greatest donor on earth. The written-off 292 million dollars aid to Bangladesh is a remarkable American generosity, no doubt.

Under a bilateral agreement in Dhaka recently, the great gift "will exempt Bangladesh from its repayment obligations to the US for its entire amount of outstanding official development aid in the form of project loans" and means "further support for the Bangladesh government's efforts to sustain the pace of economic reform."

Being one of the five poorest countries in the world has had this nation indebted to the world's donors, despite the doubts about repayment possibilities. This extraordinary debt relief will relieve her off a

virtual cancer in her economic vitality already burdened with 11.4 billion dollars foreign debt for her 99% development.

Apart from the harvests of aid policies toward the Third World, such controversial generosity are bound to generate reviews of debt factors henceforth. Also, an investigation into the percentage of utilization of aids by Bangladesh may have to be undertaken with respect to the allegations which make up the political oratory on the election eve and evolve least effect offshoots.

Like many of her past unparalleled deeds, this lion-hearted debt forgiveness of superpower USA may raise some eyebrows worldwide but may also stimulate some nail-bittings on her domestic fronts owing chiefly to her own inadequacies covering 33.6 million poor, disheartening unemployment and homeless rates, and alarming communal violence coupled with embar-

assing drug-alcohol-AIDS scenario. But, to Bangladeshis could this humaneness be somehow, a compensation for the US stand on the liberation struggle of Bangladesh.

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### New column

Sir, In spite of many lapses quite natural in our overall state of affairs, you deserve our congratulations for the simple reason that although the press had never been free in the past, nor it is free today as claimed by the government and its arrogant henchmen, you have made the Daily Star an envied newspaper. It appears that you have been busy to some extent with things that really mattered. However, investigative journalism or any bloodless journalistic coup against any corrupt politician, industrialist or business magnet etc is still a far cry.

Meanwhile, with introduction of a new column 'Spotlight on Middle East' you will surely add new feathers to your cap. Mr. Muehsuddin Ahmad has written about a dozen of very balanced and illuminating articles on Middle

East during the last one and a half years. I would request you to please start a weekly column on the 'subcontinent'. It is all the more necessary for a nation to know its neighbours.

K. R. Zakhrui  
Rupali Bank Ltd. Z. O. Khulna.

### Travel by ship for Haj

Sir, The government arranges only air flights for the Hajis. Air flights are now-a-days too expensive and the present cost of the Haj for a Bangladeshis is beyond capacity of a commonman. In the past, ships were arranged for the Hajis and the transport cost by sea to Jeddah and back to Chittagang was undoubtedly much cheaper than that of the air flights.

Would the government particularly the Prime Minister, Ministers for Religious Affairs and Shipping take their personal initiative to arrange ships for the Hajis during the ensuing pre and post Haj periods commencing in May and June next respectively. As there is ample time to negotiate and charter Foreign passenger ships, it is hoped that the gov't will kindly take initiative in this regard.

A Bangladeshi