

## GROUND REALITIES

## What good has come of President's dialogue?

*The core issue left untouched*

THE President's three-week long dialogue with 24 political parties including the key players BNP and AL, may have earned him accolade for his diligence, tenacity and handling of a task that was basically thrust upon him. But in substance, it has had very little to commend itself for. On the contrary, the outcome merely repeated what the EC had proposed nearly nine months ago as we elaborate below. It's all the more frustrating when clearly an opening was provided through the initiative as this paper had repeatedly commented.

The President succeeded in drawing the opposition BNP into a talking mode from what had been a boycotting mindset. Repeated, rather half-hearted, invitations from the PM to the opposition leader to come out with her formula on caretaker issue failing, the presidential initiative did raise a hope for softening of their hard public positionings.

Thus, it was a rare opportunity for the AL and BNP to come to grips with the core issue of caretaker government favoured by all political parties except for Jatiya Party and AL. Keeping the principal political contention hanging, the President's formula on EC formation is neither novel nor is it inclusive and inspiring.

Well before the presidential talks on reconstitution of Election Commission, the EC had recommended formation of a search committee as provided for in the Constitution. Actually, since 2008 the talk of a search committee to reconstitute the EC on its expiry has been going on. Even the Prime Minister as early as in May spoke of constituting a search committee. The original recommendations of the Election Commission as per constitutional principles included the incumbent CEC as a member of the search committee. The idea was that he would bring to bear his experience on the work of the search committee. But the President's suggestion clearly keeps him out of the picture.

One can quite see that the President's constitutional mandate is limited as he has to act on the advice of the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister has a serious intent to resolve bone of contention i.e. caretaker issue she should use the good offices of the President to this end. Because, given his constitutional position, the President is looked upon as a moral guardian of the state.

## Rid Gulshan Lake of grabbers Land ministry's intervention required

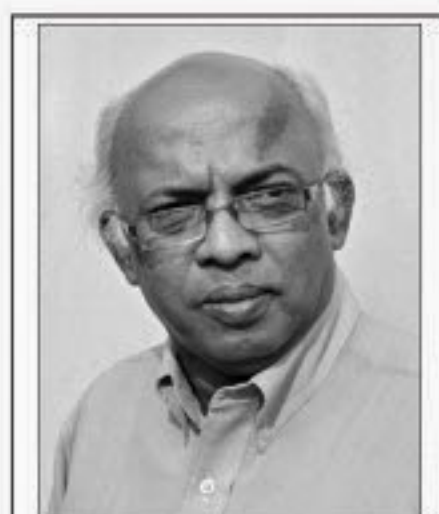
THE recent encroachment of the Gulshan Lake is yet another stark instance of how the capital city's wetlands and canals are facing constant threats from land grabbers. A news item carried in a leading Bengali daily shows that a dam over five bighas has been put up across the lake without any permission from concerned authorities, dividing it in the middle. Worse still, several tin-shed houses have been erected along the dam, that too, by claiming land ownership. We express our grave concern at such malpractices in the face of the city's shrinking water bodies.

What worries us more is the fact that the encroachers are outrageously operating right under the nose of Rajuk, city authorities and the law enforcing agencies as if they are given a free hand through some collusive arrangements. It has been a long time since the Gulshan Lake was subjected to pollution and illegal land filling. If this trend continues, soon the grabbers will fill in the rest of the lake, thus killing one of the largest inland water bodies in the city.

For all we know, about 40 acres of the 100-acre lake falls outside the ambit of Rajuk's authority which is why the authorized body is in a quandary about how to monitor those undemarcated parts. There are also some unresolved disputes as to the ownership of land since dwellers of the newly built houses along the dam as well as of those built previously along the lake shore are claiming to have bought them from legal owners. In most cases, however, lands belonging to the lake were sold by influential grabbers having political clouts.

In view of the continued degradation of the lake, we urge the land ministry to intervene sooner rather than later and bring the law and order forces into picture. A joint drive would do really well to free lands from the

# Old mistakes, new lessons...



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

NOW that Ghulam Azam has been taken into custody, our expectations of a proper, fair and full trial of the war

criminals of 1971 take a newer, happier dimension. We do not mean to prejudge the course of the trial of those who have been brought into the net of the law and those who might be picked up at a later stage. The good bit in the war crimes story is that every effort has been expended into making sure that the process of the trials meets internationally accepted legal standards, that indeed no questions are raised about the transparency of the trials. Those who have been accused of crimes committed in the course of the War of Liberation must be satisfied that it is justice, not revenge, the state of Bangladesh means to pursue. For those of us who have not forgotten the manner in which the Pakistan army and its local collaborators went about killing, raping and burning, the goal remains an attainment of justice as a means of bringing the past to an end through letting the war criminals know that while they may have got away with their notoriety in the past four decades, history is now about to catch up with them. Finally.

Ah, but for a people conscious of history we have in all these years since Bangladesh emerged into freedom and sunlight often fallen foul of history. And we have often been rendered weak and pusillanimous where battling the demons intent on humiliating us in this free land is concerned. Begin with Ghulam Azam again. He entered the country in 1977 on a

Pakistani passport stamped with a Bangladesh visa. The visa soon expired and yet the Ziaur Rahman regime did nothing to have him leave Bangladesh or pay the penalty for overstaying his allotted period. That inaction was and remains inexcusable, considering that the Jamaat leader went travelling across the Arab world and Europe even after 1971 propagating the cause of a "reunification of East Pakistan" with the rest of Pakistan. He stayed on in Bangladesh. Anti-history took a new turn in the early 1990s when Ghulam Azam was informed that he could be a Bangladesh citizen after all.

There are all the ironies we have seen taking shape and form before us. A pretty good number of Bengali officers of the Pakistan foreign service were not loath to serve under the Bhutto government after 1971. For these individuals, Bangladesh was a tentative arrangement and it would only be a matter of time before the renegade province of East Pakistan would return to the embrace of a brotherly West Pakistan. By 1974, however, Bhutto saw little need for these Bengalis to remain in the service of Pakistan. They came back to Bangladesh and were with alacrity absorbed in the new country's foreign service. That was a mistake, for it is always suicidal to expect one who has not been properly loyal to his land to turn around, suddenly, and proclaim his new patriotism. Do not forget that these men subsequently rose to high niches in the government, especially in those

dominated by soldiers who had, Pakistan-like, commandeered the civil administration.

Which reminds you once more of the amazement with which Fidel Castro heard Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman tell him that all Bengali civil and military officers trapped in Pakistan had finally returned home to serve in the government of Bangladesh. The Cuban leader's surprise was not so much in knowing that these officers had come back home as in discovering the fact that they had all been taken into the service of the new state without any screening. Let us face it. Not every Bengali who served under the central authority of

Pakistan was enamoured of Bangladesh. As the late Syed Najmuddin Hashim would have you know through his diary *Bondishala Pakistan*, a fairly good number of Bengali civilian officers, detained in camps in

Pakistan post-1971, were furious about Pakistan's break-up and about Mujib governing Bangladesh. And yet these very men were to climb some of the tallest ladders in a country they had not approved of, to hold some of the highest positions in administration.

So these mistakes were made and no matter how sweetly you try to paper them over, you know very well of the damage that has been done. Within the span of ten years -- and that was the first decade of Bangladesh's freedom -- all our brilliant, brave freedom fighters in the armed forces were done to death. Go back to the statistics. Beginning with the death of Khaled Musharraf and

ending with the officers hanged in dubious manner in the aftermath of Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981, it is a list of murdered freedom fighters you have before you. Nothing was to happen to those repatriated from Pakistan, except for Brigadier Jamiluddin Ahmed (who died trying to save Bangabandhu in August 1975). It makes you think. And you wonder too why after all these years no government, no military establishment in Bangladesh has thought it necessary to rehabilitate the officers murdered in the name of a so-called Sepoy-Janata revolution in 1975 as also those executed later, all the way from 1976 to 1981.

When you speak of the war and of the havoc it caused in our lives, you have good reason to ask why the 195 Pakistani military officers earmarked for trial in Bangladesh were let off by Bangabandhu's administration. You may not agree all the time with Pakistan's politicians, but when men like Imran Khan tell you that had Pakistan learnt lessons from 1971 conditions would be different in Islamabad today, you cannot but agree. Had we in Bangladesh insisted on placing, indeed placed those 195 officers on trial for the crime of having committed genocide, we would not be dealing with the old local quislings of the Pakistan occupation army today.

But the satisfaction is all, despite these forty years of chaotic silence on our part. And it is that we have as a nation finally begun the process of reclaiming our history. The trial of the war criminals, like the trial of Bangabandhu's assassins, must be a lesson for us -- that untruth must not be indulged, that it must be put to flight. A nation which blurs the distinction between patriots and traitors is condemned to perdition.

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# What to do, and not do, about North Korea

ROBERT L. GALLUCCI

THE death of North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il, and the ascendance to power of one of his sons, Kim Jong-un, creates some opportunities and potential traps for the administration and senior leaders in the United States -- things they should be sure to say and be sure not to say.

First, we should recognise that we have been here before. Sort of. In 1994, I learned of the death of Kim Il-sung in an early morning telephone call from the South Korean foreign minister. I was in Geneva leading negotiations with the North Koreans over their nuclear weapons programme. The first question in the minds of those in Washington and Seoul was how the transition of power in North Korea from father to son would change things -- whether the negotiations would continue, whether it would be business as usual or the beginning of a crisis. We preferred the former and, as it turned out, so did the North. The talks continued and an agreement was signed that stopped the North's plutonium production until we abandoned the deal eight years later, because of the North's cheating with uranium enrichments technology.

We may be as fortunate this time, even though this son is a lot younger and less experienced than his father was when he assumed authority. The traditional mourning period in Korea is a year, and even Kim Jong-il, who was by then a familiar figure in North Korean power circles, took almost that long before assuming all the leadership positions his own father had held. The lesson here is patience: We should resist drawing conclusions too soon about who is really in

charge in North Korea.

Heading the "do not say" list for any American leader, or would-be leader, is that this is the time to promote or provoke regime change in North Korea. We used to hear a lot about regime change about a decade ago, with reference to the Axis of Evil, and now the phrase is being resurrected to capture the urge to get rid of North Korea's horrendous totalitarian government.

There may never be a good time to openly advocate the overthrow of the government in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, and certainly the moment when a new young leader may have to decide whether he needs to prove his leadership prowess

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is definitely not the right time. Insisting on regime change now, as Mitt Romney came very close to doing in a statement on Monday morning, creates no incentive for this government to even consider negotiations, or to contemplate backing off or ever giving up its nuclear weapons programme. It is just plain dumb.

What does make sense is to continue to deplore the humanitarian catastrophe that is life in North Korea and to say that we would welcome the day when the government in that country moved toward democratic governance and a free economy.

Among the first things we should tell the North is that we remain pre-

pared to enter discussions aimed at halting, rolling back and ultimately dismantling its nuclear weapons programme. This may sound like old news, but it is not. The Obama administration has been sensitive to the domestic political needs of its ally, South Korea, which demand that before proceeding to talks, the United States should obtain some acknowledgement from the North of responsibility for the deaths caused by the sinking of a South Korean ship and the shelling of a South Korean island. The president's advisers have also been sensitive to anticipated criticism from Republicans that initiating talks with the North would represent appeasement, would demonstrate

pared to finish the deal.

Moreover, we should not be in the business of teaching other governments lessons. We should adopt the best policies to protect our national security. Right now, that means entering a serious discussion about the North's nuclear weapons programme, aimed at its dismantlement.

Finally, there is an opportunity for the administration to tell the North Koreans something hard and realistic that they desperately need to hear during a transition to new leadership: The United States will not tolerate the transfer to another government or terrorist group of any nuclear weapons material or technology or fissile material, and we will respond with devastating consequences for the North if we learn of such a transfer.

The North's role in the secret construction in Syria of a plutonium production reactor in 2007 should have crossed a red line for the Bush administration. It apparently did not. Had it not been for Israel's version of a nonproliferation policy -- aerial bombardment of the site -- the Middle East might already have been fundamentally changed by the North's outrageous move. Our security is endangered by any such transfers, which make nuclear terrorism and the loss of whole cities entirely plausible. Our government needs to make sure the new government in North Korea never attempts such transfers again.

The writer is President, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and was the chief negotiator with North Korea during the administration of President Bill Clinton.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 18

1913

A Greek flotilla defeats the Ottoman Navy in the Naval Battle of Lemnos during the First Balkan War, securing the islands of the Northern Aegean Sea for Greece.

1919

World War I: The Paris Peace Conference opens in Versailles, France.

1974

A Disengagement of Forces agreement is signed between the Israeli and Egyptian governments, ending conflict on the Egyptian front of the Yom Kippur War.

2002

Sierra Leone Civil War is finally declared over.

2009

Gaza War: Hamas announces they will accept Israeli Defense Forces's offer of a ceasefire, ending the assault.