

### Poll Violence in India

The violence in Indian politics that took the life of Congress President Rajiv Gandhi appears to be engulfing the whole electoral process. More and more candidates are finding it unsafe to go for open campaigning with some even going into hiding. The atmosphere has become so vitiated and the election process so questionable that the Indian President, Ramaswamy Venkataraman, felt compelled to go public with an appeal reminding all political parties of their "solemn duty" to ensure that polling is free and fair.

The Indian electoral process seems to have acquired all possible malaise there is in the book. From rigging, intimidating voters, booth capturing to the ultimate in election spoiling — murdering of candidates — all appear to have come together to cripple what used to be, and still is, the most stable democracy in the Third World. Even government officials, charged with conducting the election have been known to connive with political parties to rig elections. The murdering of candidates that is now becoming widespread in some states of India, is creating panic in the public mind. They are becoming hesitant about participating in the polls. So far 230 people have died in poll violence since early April when campaigning began. It was this gruesome development that perhaps forced the President to break tradition and protocol and address the Indian people on television (the Indian President makes only two ceremonial public appearances a year, one on 26 January and the other on 15 August) and warn that "a country ceases to be a democracy where the will of the people is not reflected in the elections and where the sacred right to vote is deprived either by a dictator or by musclemen employed by unscrupulous politicians." It was pathetic to listen to the President of the biggest democracy in the world, trying to sing the virtues of free and fair elections which the Indian people have known and practised for long.

To ensure the safety of some high-risk politicians, the Indian government has ordered drastic changes in security rules, a revision of the rule book for the security forces, and has barred politicians from accepting garlands and bouquets from strangers. The first casualty of the beefed up security for politicians is of course open campaigning and direct contact with voters, which is the very soul of electioneering.

The question that must be asked at this stage is why has the Indian election become so violence prone? The leaders will have to face the fact that the violence which is vitiating the election is not the cause but the effect of the violence that exists in the society — a violence that springs from years of discrimination and neglect. Election, which was meant to serve the cause of the unrepresented, became a means of maintaining the privilege of the rich and the powerful. While ethnic, caste and communal issues plagued India from its very inception, it was the gradual loss of people's faith in the electoral process to bring about just and fair changes that made the current violence widespread.

Therefore the real challenge that faces the Indian leaders is not only to hold a free and fair election, but to make that election meaningful for the vast majority of ignorant, deprived and discriminated Indians.

### Realising a Golden Dream

Education had never been one of the high-priority things with our successive governments. Some socialistic approaches made without being properly equipped to implement them made a mess of things in the schools and colleges in the early years of independence. The one or two good streaks truly helpful to youngsters that show up here and there even now are mostly echoes from those well-meaning things come down from those distant days.

The unchanging low-priority, however, was more than made up by the successive governments' inexplicable eagerness to have ever-new education policies tampering with both the content and the format of the education offered and at times even the underlying philosophy and the organisational structures of it. Some of these were patently injurious to all pedagogical norms and anti-people in the bargain and had to be foisted only at the cost of huge student and mass movements. But the cause of a higher niche for education in the priorities and the need to seriously take up the Qudrat-i-Khuda Commission Report — the best document so far designed to salvage the nation from its educational morass — continue to remain hopelessly a cry in the wilderness.

Our recommenced march towards democracy brings back to us hopes that we had almost given up — a higher priority reflected in higher GDP-percentage allocation figures and increased activity on the field reflected in a spurt in enrolment figures as well as number of institutions — and taking up the Khuda Commission Report in right earnest. We do not want to set our educational expectations on unrealistically high perches. But we would very much like the present government to be wary of the previous government's sleight of hand that it so successfully fooled the nation with regard to universalization of primary education and achievement of a respectable literacy figure.

This is a caution that gains in cogency with certain disturbing thoughts coming from the south. We haven't yet had any reliable figures for what the April 29 visitation did to the educational facilities of the affected areas. How much will it take to rebuild them to their old shapes?

We have however some figure for the Khulna Division which was largely spared by that cataclysmic strike. Published in a vernacular national daily they speak of 384 schools being altogether demolished. Damaged up to 75 per cent were some 1208 schools. The report puts the loss at Tk 10 crore in monetary terms — which is evidently a very conservative estimate. Can we have from this any idea of what will be needed to be done in the Chittagang Division?

How much do we spend on building new schools every year? How many new schools are added to the present shameful figure? Our performance in the school building sector is persistently so poor that we fear if we can make up for the losses in schools without any loss of academic years. Let democracy prove our fears wrong.

We had once a golden dream. In the areas prone to tidal bore each school would be a fortification against the watery surges. This is a god-send chance to realise that dream.

# UN Peace Resolution 687 Punishes Iraqi People

The resolution 687 which was passed by the UN Security Council sometime ago is undoubtedly a punitive one. Similar kind of resolution imposed by the Allied Forces on Germany is believed to have led to the rise of Hitler. Defeat itself is a punishment. Further punitive measures imposed by the victors on a defeated nation do not really advance peace; these only sow the seeds of further unrest and future aggressions.

Nobody would have bothered if President Saddam was punished but unfortunately this UN resolution will punish Iraqi people and indeed punish them unjustly. Iraqi people took punishment from Saddam for years, now they have to take it again from the US led alliance and that also under a resolution approved by the UN. This resolution involving huge payments for war reparations will put Iraqi people into endless sufferings for decades if not for centuries. They are being asked to pay for atrocities committed by Saddam and his associates but who pays for the colossal destructions of Iraqi civilian properties and infrastructures including civilian water supplies and sewerage systems and also the electric supplies which were outside the scope of the UN resolutions on liberation of Kuwait?

Who compensates the Iraqi people for the deaths of thousands of civilians including hundreds of women and children in well marked air shelter by the allied bombings? Reparation of war damages is a legitimate question but if the victors had to dictate terms to the vanquished, then why did they bring the UN in the picture and made it a tool in the hands of a few members? Saddam and his associates must be held responsible

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

avoided if President Gorbachev's peace plan was accepted even with suitable modifications, which involved only a few days extra for withdrawal from Kuwait. But unfortunately, the intransigence of both sides prevailed. The US and the Allied forces knew beforehand that all the Kuwaiti oil wells were put under heavy explosives and these were only to be ignited. But still

Union supported the US sponsored resolution in the Security Council for some other considerations and loaded the Iraqi people with an extremely heavy reparation bill that mortgage the future of generations to come. It seems that the UN Secretary General has suggested 30% of the total Iraqi oil export earnings to be set aside in a special fund towards

of oil worth \$1 billion, the only source of Iraq's foreign exchange earnings is yet to be cleared by the Special Committee of UN Security Council members. Once the war was officially over and peace imposed, there is no justification for denying the Iraqi people their legitimate right to international trade and other economic activities. Only thing that should be ensured is that Saddam does not use the oil sale proceeds to buy arms

where nearly quarter of a million Iraqi soldiers and civilians were killed, Saddam Hussein is hale and hearty. If his removal was not the US war objective, it is not understood why President Bush called upon the Iraqi people to remove Saddam, apparently to second such open call to remove a sovereign country's president — first one being his call on Panamanian people to oust Noriega. But as it seems the US now has made Saddam's removal a condition for US flexibilities in dealing with Iraq's post-war matters including war reparations? Indeed, President Bush's call and reportedly some other form of help from the US led to Kurdish unrest in the North of Iraq.

This attracted Saddam's brutal army action on Kurdish people, which, in turn, caused not only untold human sufferings but also created an unprecedented diplomatic situation for the UN in dealing with the Kurdish refugees in the so called "safe havens." It should be remembered that Saddam can not be removed by the Kurds alone; it has to be a decision of the Iraqi people and put into action by themselves.

The author, a former Secretary and Ambassador, is a writer on international affairs.

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for destructions and damages in Kuwait and there must be ways to deal with them even without inflicting total punishment on the Iraqi population as a whole. However, it should also be remembered that destructions and damages in Kuwait and particularly the ghastly oil fires (it is suggested that heaps of huge sand bags piled on each other from all sides on each oil well on fire by appropriate mechanical means might help extinguish the fire) which occurred only in the final days of the war by deliberate actions of the Iraqi armed forces and also partly by the allied bombings could be

President Bush ordered the ground battle as apparently Saddam could not be allowed to go unpunished and undefeated. Thus one can clearly see that the objective of some members the US led alliance was not liberation of Kuwait only; it was also something else — destruction of a sovereign country's military capabilities — again something the UN did not authorise.

The Allied members also could not allow Gorbachev some form of political gains in the M-East, which would have long term implications on superpower influence in the region. Despite all these Soviet

the war reparations. The US and Britain seem to be unhappy with the percentage as they wanted a higher percentage for the purpose. It is to be noted here that no one country, if its developmental needs are taken into consideration, should be asked to pay more than 25% of its total export earnings towards repayment of any debt. And in case of Iraq it is not only its normal developmental needs but also the reconstruction of its war devastated infrastructure. As it seems, a big portion of the oil revenue of poorer Iraq will go to aid the oil rich Kuwait. The Iraqi proposal for sale

and this can be done only by the arms suppliers some of which are, unfortunately, the Allied members themselves. However, if the Allied members continue to squeeze Iraq on all fronts, there is genuine fear that the Iraqi people would face hunger and death in the coming days. There is already reports that the child mortality rate has gone up considerably due to malnutrition and lack of medicine. The UN General Assembly should consider the matter very carefully and ensure that a nation, for the fault of its leader, does not become crippled. Despite a devastating war

## THINK TANK TEN LOOK BEYOND 2000

# Summit Plans News Paths for the Commonwealth

Derek Ingram writes from London

The leaders of ten countries are meeting in London to discuss future roles for the Commonwealth (June 11-12). Their proposals will be put before the next full summit in Harare in October. Many subjects are on their agenda. One is to decide the criteria by which countries should be eligible to join now that decolonisation has ended. Others include ways of buttressing democracy and improving human rights.

WHEN someone had the bright idea that the time had come to take a good look at the 50-nation Commonwealth and by setting up a think tank to examine what direction it might take as it headed for the year 2000 and beyond, it was seen as an exercise for the civil servants.

It turned out rather differently. At their biennial summit held in Kuala Lumpur in 1989 the presidents and prime ministers had different ideas: they wanted a hand in the exercise themselves. They would form their own committee, and in the make-up-the-rules-as-you-go-along way in which the Commonwealth often works it was decided that the committee should consist of those heads of government whose countries had hosted summits. They number ten.

Since Nigeria held the first Commonwealth summit outside Britain in 1966 the meeting has been wonderfully peripatetic. It has been held in London only twice — in 1969 and 1977. The third time may be in 1993.

So this formula for forming a committee of the top people meant its members ranged from Singapore, the host in 1971, and Zambia to Malaysia and Jamaica. At that point the committee would have included people like Margaret Thatcher, Rajiv Gandhi and Lee Kuan Yew.

The first idea was that this group, which also contained Brian Mulroney of Canada, Bob Hawke of Australia, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Michael Manley of Jamaica, would meet twice and then report their findings to the next summit, which is to be held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in October.

For one reason or another the first meeting did not happen. When the practicalities were examined two meetings of such a high-powered committee in between two summits seemed over-ambitious. The talks were finally fixed for last January.

Then came the Gulf crisis. At short notice the meeting was called off. In the meantime a group of high-powered officials have held several meet-



The Commonwealth Think Tank  
All leaders of countries that have hosted summits (dates in brackets)

ings and much thinking and discussion has gone on at the official and unofficial level on the future of the Commonwealth. It has been a highly important exercise because the Commonwealth, like the world itself, is at something of a crossroads.

Springing out of the British Empire, it is the oldest international club of nations in the world. Its leaders have been meeting more or less regularly

ever since World War Two — and before that imperial summits go back into last century. It is now 50 countries strong and more countries are knocking at the door to come in — notably Cameroon and Mozambique. It is a more important international influence than it thinks it is — and certainly a great deal more than the British, who started it all, think it is.

his country is host he will not be in the chair. That position is taken by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohammad, as the man who chaired the last full summit.

Round the table, too will be Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia for 26 years and veteran of more Commonwealth meetings than any other leader still in office.

The ten are in London to decide directions and ground rules for the Commonwealth of the future. The review is not happening because anyone thinks the Commonwealth is falling apart. It is far less likely to do that today than it was in the Sixties and Seventies.

Rather, now that a post-Cold War world is ushering in an age of multi-partyism and apartheid seems at last to be on the way out in South Africa the Commonwealth needs to set itself on new courses.

High on the agenda are such subjects as the buttressing of democracy, the need to pay more attention to human rights, attention to the global environment and ways in which the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can become more central to Commonwealth action.

Ideas are around to give the NGOs a role at specialist Commonwealth meetings and even in some cases to include them as members of delegations. A special fund may be set up to help them step up their activities — to make it more of a people's Commonwealth as well as a community of governments.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is already increasing its work in the area of election observing. Teams were sent to Malaysia and Bangladesh and another is going shortly to Guyana to ensure that elections there are free and fair.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, recently set down what he sees as the four essential ingredients of democracy:

The participation of the adult population in the selection and removal of government through free and fair elections.

Freedom of association and of expression, including freedom of the press.

The transparency of the processes of government and the accountability of government.

The rule of law, with guarantees for equality under the law.

Plans have to be developed to help South Africa in its transition stage.

There is a good chance that South Africa will come back into Commonwealth membership after it has achieved majority rule (it withdrew in 1961).

Then there is the whole subject of the criteria for future membership of the Commonwealth, about which nothing is firmly laid down. Hitherto it has consisted of countries which were once British-ruled. Now Namibia, which was never a British colony, has joined and Cameroon, a mainly francophone country, has applied to join. Others may apply. The committee of ten leaders will have to recommend guidelines to the full summit in Harare.

And on the delicate matter of human rights the pressures are on from NGOs representing lawyers, doctors, journalists and trade unionists for the Commonwealth to make sure its own house is in better order.

When the ten meet in London's historic Lancaster House, where many colonies once sued for independence at talks with Britain, their task is no less than that of re-launching the Commonwealth into the next century — GEMINI NEWS

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## To the Editor...

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.

### Water-logging at Pallabi

Sir, Kindly allow me to draw the attention of the appropriate authorities to the water-logging problem which the inhabitants of Block 1, Pallabi, Mirpur are facing for the last several years. Due to inadequate drainage facility, rain water accumulates and inundates the roads and premises of the houses situated on this Block during the rainy season quite frequently. And during moderately heavy shower, rain water not only inundates the area but also enters the ground floor of the houses, thereby marooning the people inside their houses causing indescribable sufferings to the office-goers and school and college going children and damaging property, furniture and appliances besides posing hazard to the health of the residents.

The magnitude of the problem is increasing every year because, in the name of expansion and development of the city, natural drains and low lands which were normal outlets of rain water, are being allowed to be filled up without providing for alternate and adequate drainage facilities. Although crores of Taka were spent in the past few years for beautification of the city and construction of super markets, no attention was paid to improve this basic amenity. Reports with photographs on this problem of Block 1 of Pallabi were published in the national dailies several times in the past and all concerned agencies including the local Ward Commissioners and the City Corporation were approached for remedy, but no serious attention was given whereas the municipal tax of the holdings was increased manifold during the past few

years. Without even examining the cause of the problem thoroughly and increasing the drainage capacity at the extreme end from where it is supposed to be discharged out, only the roadside drains of this Block were replaced last year by underground pipes which did not improve the situation, rather the money so spent was wasted. It also remains a big question whether the work done was in conformity with the amount paid for this job. Pallabi is generally resided by people of modest income who purchased the constructed houses from its promoters M/s Eastern Housing Ltd with their lives' savings and you can well understand the feeling of the owners / residents seeing the damages this problem is causing to their property and belongings every year.

Eastern Housing Ltd are not willing to accept any responsibility for this problem on the plea that the place was taken over from them by the Government after liberation. Now that the water-logging problem of the city was discussed at a high-level meeting presided over by the LGRD and Cooperative Minister wherein a high-powered Committee headed by none other than

the City Mayor was formed to examine all the relevant aspects, to conduct on the spot review and to submit its recommendations to the Government for immediate solution of the problem, I would draw the attention of the Committee to this water-logging problem of Block 1 of Pallabi. Mirpur and request the Committee to include this problem in their report to save the residents of Block 1, Pallabi from this curse once for all. S.A Moazzam Pallabi, Dhaka.

### Not too much to do

Sir, We being again free citizens of a modern state, I want to make the following suggestions to fellow citizens and fellow sufferers. In the past we have seen bondage thrown upon us by the state, by various styles of governments, claiming it to be necessary for the sake of, we were told, national unity, economic needs, etc. etc. We have seen 'lakes excavated and bridges built'; we, however, did not have the simple freedom to do simple good things around ourselves. Apart from imposing grand schemes which are supposed to solve all our problems

overnight and which admittedly might be a situational necessity the present government may do well to heed the small problems of the common man which, I believe, is the real generator of confidence and economic values in our society today. For example, when importing something through the Dhaka Airport, ensure that we do not have to go to the same table twice for stamps; or, ensure that traffic can turn left unhindered at major city intersections; or, have one more teller at the bank counter when paying electricity bills during busy periods. The list is endless. Such small remedies do not require the World Bank's assistance yet solve the immediate problem for the day, and every day. How do we know what those small problems are that are of such vital national importance? There are several suggestions. One suggestion is that a separate 'Ministry for Small Problems' may be created. The Prime Minister may take the portfolio. One fixed day in a week she may listen to people coming to her with small problems and pass instructions to relevant ministries to get them solved. Another is solving individual

problems published in 'Letters to the Editor' columns in newspapers. Yet another is making our senior bureaucrat do the clerk's job once in a while. Efforts like these win elections. Grand unimplementable programmes do not. Syed M Quader, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

### Pledge to help

Sir, I fully agree with the view about not practicing Gurbani this year. I feel, that's a very humane thing to do. We should all pledge to donate money to our needy fellow citizens than to slaughter our livestock. By this, we will save our livestock resources, a considerable part of which we have already lost in the cyclone, and also provide the needy with basic necessities. That's the least we can do for our fellow citizens. I feel, religion preaches to save lives than to destroy and this is the time to do it. So, let us all pledge to contribute money to the needy. That way we will be morally satisfied. After all, it is gathered, in some of the Muslim countries sacrificing animals is not practiced in a fashion we do. Inran Rahman, Dhaka.