

No Clear Verdict for Pakistan

In the fairest general election in Pakistan's history, Benazir Bhutto's triumphal return was expected; for everything that was happening in the past turbulent months was in fact in her favour. But with a total of 86 seats, only 14 more than Nawaz Sharif's 72, Benazir now finds herself in an intriguing situation where she will have to count on the support of independent elected members of parliament and some small parties obviously not ideologically aligned, to form a government.

However, those who closely followed the election campaign of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) have proved right in their prediction of a hung parliament. Clearly, the election results are not likely to solve the problem Pakistan has been thrown into by the bitter rivalries between these two leaders. Mercifully though, the third contender in the power game seems to have taken his leave for good. In fact Benazir, Sharif and Ishaq Khan showed scant regard for the Pakistani electorate during the critical periods leading to the compromise solution for holding this just-concluded election. Disenchanted, the Pakistanis have also let their feelings known by their poor turn-out at the polling centres.

By doing so the people of Pakistan have also sent a message to the politicians, particularly Benazir and Sharif, each of whom boasts more plus points than other Pakistani leaders. The message is that despite their charisma and commercial clouts, people are less convinced now than any time in their ability to deliver the goods Pakistan desperately needs at this juncture. In fact, technocrat-turned-interim president, Moeen Qureshi has done an admirable job — comparable to Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed's during his tenure in Bangladesh — for them. His ruthless efficiency in ensuring a fair election, restoring order in the country's economy and successfully waging a war against the drug lords stands a high profile unmatched by anything achieved by the two former prime ministers. The people's disillusion is only too understandable.

It is at this point the two leaders of Pakistan will be asked to bring the best out of them. Their political savvy is pitted against insurmountable odds and they must come through the test with aplomb. For leadership of countries like Pakistan, the main problem is to put the national interests before the personal ones. Benazir and Sharif have more than a fair share of that problem. Now is the time when they needed to prove themselves otherwise. This general election, the fourth in eight years and third in five years, is a clear indication of the fragility stunting the democratic process in Pakistan. Unless the politics takes a definite shape on the party line — not just centering round this or that personality — and the leaders can agree to differ in parliament, Pakistan's prospect of turning into a modern democratic society looks pretty bleak.

The results of the polls have undoubtedly demanded a more responsible and far-sighted response from both the winner and the loser than they could muster in the past, particularly in 1988 when Nawaz Sharif as chief minister of Punjab defied the central government and created a federal deadlock that proved Benazir's undoing. A repetition of this cannot be ruled out and in that case the country will slide back to square one. Pakistan can no more afford such political lapses that produce poisonous fruits for its people. If anything, it should learn from countries where the two main parties share power through an understanding, never allowing their narrow considerations to overtake the country's well-being.

As for Bangladesh and the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), we definitely want to see a politically strong Pakistan.

Receding Forests

The three biggest exploitable resources of Bangladesh, indeed of all nations of the world, are the land, the rivers and the forest. Land can be abused but not taken away and rivers can be polluted but not transported elsewhere or killed overnight. Only in the forests of our nation we have always many things up for the take fetching in ready and hefty cash. So the forest shrinks and shrinks, the green line recedes and recedes — and the country gets poorer and poorer very close to becoming a forbidding desert.

The forest-cover of this land has shrunk phenomenally. The environmental imbalance that has opened its jaws to a fateful yawn — threatening to devour all that generated beauty and bounty, is very largely the creation of the man-made deforestation or defoliation and denudation that has been going on relentlessly for last so many years. How can this dangerous course be blocked and the foolish tragedy sure to issue from this be avoided?

Quick and massive afforestation is a very apt answer to the problem of ecological degeneration of Bangladesh. But that is a big time frame thing and, given the ways of our wayward society, no afforestation programme can be expected to be both fast and massive. The crisis in the forests created by poachers of green life, their scale of regular plunder would continue to offset afforestation projects of any practicable size and speed. Together with afforestation in all earnest and by all, an all-out campaign must be launched against unauthorised felling of even one single tree in any forest — reserved ones, to be sure, but also in the unreserved ones. In fact no one may be allowed to cut down a tree standing on any public place and khas land for many years to come. To make fruitful a national moratorium on tree-felling, it must be ensured that 'authorisation' of cutting forest trees itself does not become a part of all-pervading corruption.

It is gratifying to note that Forest Minister Akbar Hossain has taken up the issue of forest plunder and has suggested formation of 'civil committees,' with local leadership in the forest-bordering areas, which would help government to fight the killers of the forest. This is indeed a good initiative. Would the minister be then a little more so and simplify the complications that afflict the management and the nurture of the forests? Forests cannot be saved by good words and intentions alone.

**A**FTER completing his three years tenure, Ambassador William B Milam returns to Washington tomorrow. As the representative of the only superpower in the world, Ambassador Milam often attracted more attention than his diplomatic colleagues. This he used quite effectively to highlight issues that concerned him. Candid and outspoken — sometimes verging on the undiplomatic — Ambassador Milam occasionally brought some hard facts to focus, especially those dealing with development and the economy. We in the press covered him unfailingly because he always made a 'good copy' — meaning he always said things that needed to be said. As a witness to Bangladesh's transition to democracy, he appears to be fully conscious of the challenging tasks that lie before us. In the interview that follows he discusses some of the important issues of the day.

On US-Bangladesh relations

The relations between our two countries and governments are without any doubt excellent, and I am sure, they will get even better.

In the area of development assistance we are involved primarily in family planning and agriculture. Our food aid is important to your government for its expenditure on its development programmes.

We also have very close cooperation between the military of Bangladesh and the military of the United States especially in disaster relief training and operations and civil works programmes, and things like that.

Our political relationship is very, very good especially after your Prime Minister's visit to Washington (earlier). She is highly regarded by the American people. The image of Bangladesh grows increasingly better because of its ability to sustain democracy and make strides to overcome its economic problems. From my own experience, I think the image of Bangladesh is really improving.

On democracy in Bangladesh

I think you have done very well. To use the agricultural metaphor, democracy is sinking its roots and beginning to flower here. If enough water and fertilizer is applied I am sure, it will flourish. But surely you can do better by strengthening the parliament and its operations, also by strengthening governance, meaning executive branch and bureaucracy be-

Interview with Ambassador William B Milam  
"Bangladesh-US Relations are Excellent"

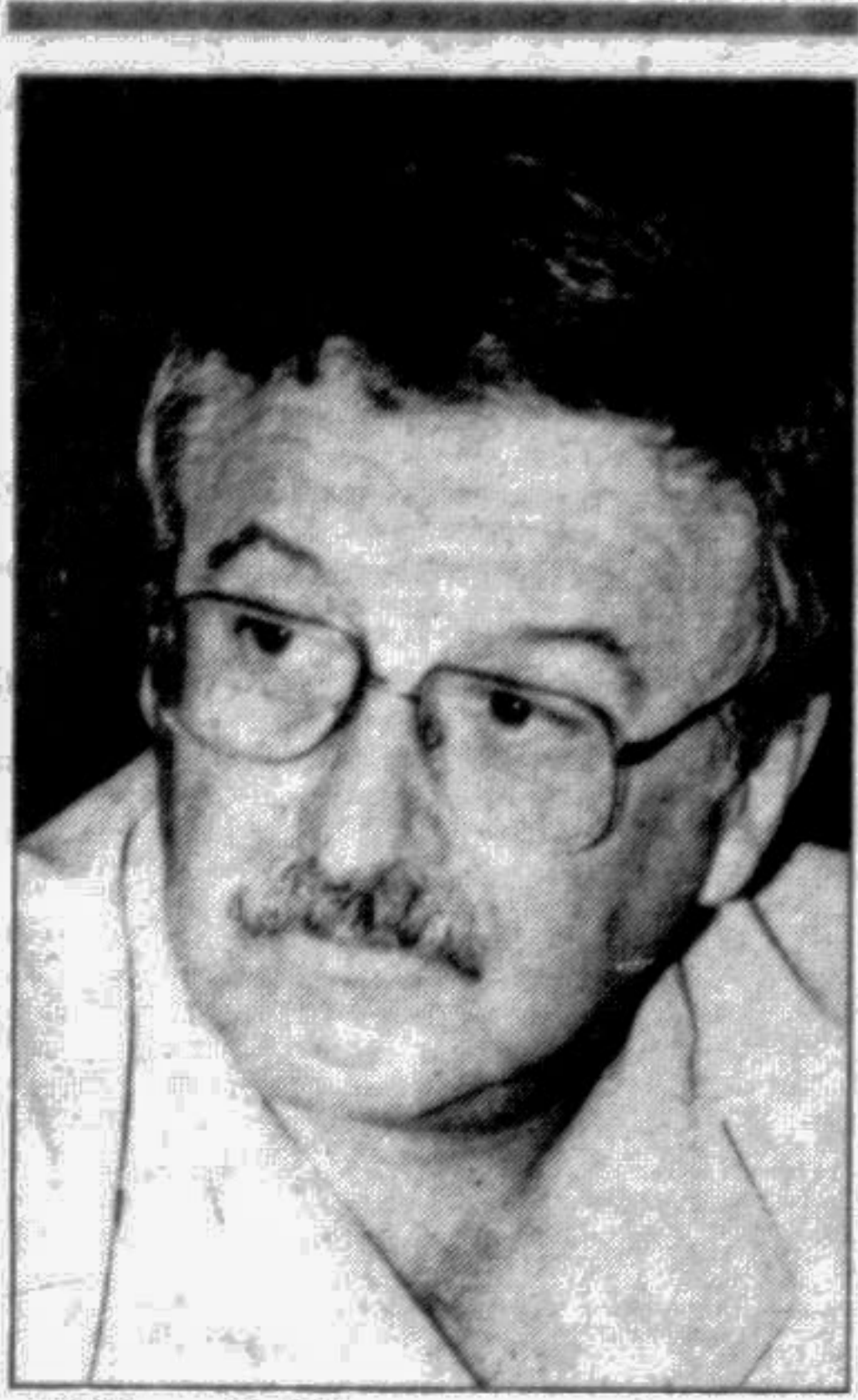
The body search, the irritating sound of the metal detector, rummaging through bags, and numerous permissions, including one to carry our tape recorders, made our visit to interview the US Ambassador a bit tedious. But all of it changed when we entered the office of William B Milam, the outgoing ambassador of the US to Bangladesh. Affable, warm, direct and with a refreshing sense of humour, Ambassador Milam gave The Daily Star his only exclusive interview — on the eve of his departure — because we approached him first, he insists, but we believe because we try so hard to serve our readers better.

A career diplomat, Mr. Milam entered diplomatic service in 1962 and served in Africa and Europe. From the State Department he received James Clement Dunn Award (1981) as the outstanding class I officer and Superior Honour Award (1983). He received Presidential Meritorious Service Award (1990) and Presidential Award for Outstanding Service (1991).

Ambassador Milam received his AB from Stanford University and MA in Economics from the University of Michigan.

Before coming to Bangladesh he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Finance and Development for five years. On his return from here he will join the office of Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs, of the State Department.

Ambassador Milam was interviewed by MAHFUZ ANAM, Executive Editor and M. ANWARUL HAQ, Chief Reporter, of The Daily Star.



William B Milam

coming more accountable and transparent.

On the recent statement that bureaucracy was an impediment to development

I was misquoted. It was reported out of context. I never intended to put the blame on any one institution or any one category of people.

On slow foreign investment

The reasons, why foreign investment is not flowing in here, are very complex and inter-related. It has to do with political stability, which is not yet as good as outsiders would like it to be. Campus violence, hartals and labour disruptions are some of the problems. And a lot of these, I must say, affect perceptions by outsiders, by people who ask — 'Shall I invest my hard-earned money in Bangladesh?' The stability aspect strikes a potential investor as very important. In

addition, your domestic market is very small and thin. Also, despite the Industrial Policy and the rhetoric, it is still not a one-stop operation.

American oil and gas companies were always interested in coming here. Now they seem to be in a better position. I gather, after the Houston conference (organised by Bangladesh) two or three US companies are close to signing agreement with your government.

On aid utilisation

It has gotten better. However, there are more improvements to be made.

A major problem is project implementation. It is still too slow. I cannot blame the government for all of the delay. However procedures continue to be elaborate and extremely cumbersome.

The government and the people have to think more about the future. You have to think of the next 20 years. You must focus clearly on your

aims.

In my own view, as far as your economy is concerned there is no alternative but to go for quick and rapid industrialisation with a strong emphasis on export orientation. Only that way you can expect to absorb the rapidly increasing work force.

On human rights

I feel a little disappointed that after the 1991 good record of your government, the human rights problem has tended to crop up again. We mentioned it in our report (State Department Report on Human Rights).

The considerable use of the Special Powers Act is a matter of concern for us.

The Anti-Terrorism Act has been used mostly against criminals. There are concerns about it also (Anti Terrorism Act) but not as much as we are concerned about SPA.

On fundamentalism

I am not concerned about the rise of fundamentalism to Bangladesh democracy per se. I

am concerned about the rise of any sort of 'ism' as a sort of panacea for desperate people. This could happen in 20 years if more serious attention is not given to the growing problem of population density, and opportunities for employment are not found.

On possible US role in solving our water sharing problem with India

I would not like to comment on it at this stage. Probably your question is a bit premature. After all, your Prime Minister has only made her speech at the UN. However, if the US could play some constructive role, in the future, and all the parties in the issue want it to, it definitely will.

On SAARC

I don't have much to say on that. In principle we hope it will be a success.

On US role in Bosnia

I know there is a very, very

strong feeling about Bosnia in Bangladesh. I understand that. But I must tell you that the Bosnian situation is much more complicated than it appears from here. Problems on the ground have been complicated by age-old ethnic hatreds, which are perhaps not solvable by intervention. And unilateral intervention is very difficult for us, because we are a democracy and public opinion at home is not in favour of such a move.

On Operation Sea Angel

Sea Angel was a high point in US-Bangladesh relations in terms of publicity, not necessarily a high point of US-Bangladesh relations, which have always been warm. It was, however, an example how much we could cooperate in times of disaster. Symbolically Bangladesh has come to our assistance (during the recent Mississippi floods) which speaks volumes about our close relations.

The Bangladesh military and civilian authorities will be able to handle disaster better because of the joint operation.

Any disappointment, during tenure here

Looking back, I would say there have been no major disappointments. However, I would like to have seen more stability. I would have liked to see that democracy was able to remove terrorism from campus, stop street violence, contain labour unrest and do away with hartals.

However, I am happy that government has been able to push educational programmes faster. That's, to my mind, the real key to the future.

Most memorable event while in Bangladesh

It was the 6th December (1990) when Shahabuddin Ahmed was going to be sworn in as interim President. We were informed about 45 minutes earlier about the event. As we were approaching Bangabhaban, we ran into a gigantic crowd. Tens of thousands of people suddenly engulfed us. They were a very happy people, dancing and shouting. As mine and other diplomatic cars were driving through, they made a thin corridor, to allow us to pass. They were shouting Bangladesh Zindabad and Jai Bangla slogans.

They appeared to me to be young people celebrating the dawn of democracy. That was the most touching and memorable scene for me in Bangladesh. I will always remember it.

Housing and Urban Development Council: Concept of Coordination

by Chapal Bashar

The lack of coordination in planning and development is not only visible in the capital city, but also exists in other cities and towns in the country for which dwellers have to pay and suffer. The unplanned urban development affected housing sector too and virtually deprived millions from adequate shelter.

planning and development is not only visible in the capital city, but also exists in other cities and towns in the country for which dwellers have to pay and suffer. The unplanned urban development affected housing sector too and virtually deprived millions from adequate shelter. Nevertheless, this time, the adoption of the Housing Policy along with a provision to set up a national level body for coordination, is undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

Let us have a look at the initiatives of the past governments in this regard. All this initiatives centred round the capital city. In 1973, a team of planners and experts suggested creation of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Authority (DMDA) for coordinated improvement of the capital. An ordinance was also promulgated to this effect by the Awami League government but lapsed as it was not placed before the parliament within stipulated time.

Again, during the rule of BNP government, a study project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Dhaka Metropolitan Integrated Urban Development was undertaken in 1981. That produced a four-volume report. The report specifically mentioned lack of coordination in city's development and suggested integrated physical planning through setting up the DMDA. This rec-

ommendation also remained unimplemented while the report itself was dumped in the cellar.

During Ershad's regime, the policy-makers had the similar plan to install higher authority under a Lt. Governor for Dhaka city's integrated development, but this idea also did not materialise.

For over two decades after Bangladesh emerged as an independent state, the capital city had a rapid growth in size, infrastructure and population.

small structures of various kinds cropped up squeezing the open spaces. The mushroom growth of slums and squatters, that provide shelter to about 50 per cent of city's population, has covered a considerable space.

The existing urban areas in Bangladesh occupy 1500 square miles constituting three per cent of the total area of the country. This would cover as much as 10 per cent of land by 2025. The country's urban

development of urban areas, particularly in the big towns and the metropolitan cities.

A study on institutional arrangement of planning and development of Dhaka metropolitan areas shows that 42 organisations under 18 ministries are actively engaged in the process. The agencies, having more concern in the planning and development of the city and providing essential services include: RAJUK, Dhaka City Corporation, Dhaka WASA, Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA), Department of Public Health Engineering, Public Works Department (PWD), Telegraph and Telephone Board, Titas Gas, Water Development Board, House Building Finance Corporation, Housing and Settlement Directorate, Bangladesh Railway, Civil Aviation Authority, Inland Water Transport Authority, Dhaka Metropolitan Police and others.

These organisations often overlap their development works while lack of coordination among these agencies remain as a matter of great concern for the city dwellers. The absence of coordination is visible at all levels — decision making, planning, implementation and maintenance.

The agencies concerned have little scope to see each other or to sit together for discussing

their plans and development programmes to implement in a coordinated and concerted way.

The consequence of this disorganised 'development work' is well-felt by the urban population. Cutting and digging of roads every now and then and leaving those unrepaired, setting up of industrial units or commercial establishments in the residential areas and vice-versa, complete dislocation of utility services are only a few examples.

It is agreed that only an institutional arrangement can help coordinate the activities of the agencies and organisations. And this concept has been reflected both in the National Housing Policy (NHP) and the proposed National Housing and Urban Development Council. The council, likely to be headed by the Minister of Works, will have representation from relevant ministries, agencies and NGOs and academic institutions. The Urban Development Directorate of the Ministry of Works would act as secretariat of the council.

Besides coordinating the activities of the agencies concerned the council would also approve work programme of National Housing Authority to be constituted to provide housing to the weaker segments, low and middle income groups of the communities.

The NHP and the proposed National Council is a welcome step which should not be shelved as before. Granted that the plan for new institutional arrangement took much time to arrive — its better late than never and all's well that ends well.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

The population of Dhaka city, which was 1.7 million in 1974, increased to 3.4 million in 1981, and now stands at about 7 million. If the population growth in the city continues at this rate, the capital will have to accommodate about 10 million in the year 2000.

The area of the city is expanding — it now covers 590 square miles under the jurisdiction of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (RAJUK).

The nature of growth in infrastructure — roads, buildings etc — in the city needs little description. Skyline of Dhaka is changing with the erection of more and more high-rise buildings while medium and

population, estimated at about 23 million, will reach between 80 and 100 million by that year.

The pattern of expansion in other urban areas is similar to that of Dhaka city. But the rapid growth of urbanisation as well as development of the urban centres remain far from the desired process of coordination.

The experts blame the present institutional framework and capacities of institutions in the urban sector as major constraints to urban development — that resulted in the haphazard growth of urban centres.

There are cases of gross overlapping of functions and problem of coordination among the agencies involved in the de-

velopment and lead us all to a point of no return at the cost of endless sufferings of millions.

We disdain to drape grim reality with pretty phrases. We therefore expostulate with both Armenia and Azerbaijan for their conduct and behaviour and request them to sit together, discuss and come out successful with peaceful solution of their mutual problem and difficulty under the supervision and care of the good offices of the United Nations, without further wastage of time and loss of human life.

Unfortunately, we people in Asia always fought among ourselves in the past and paved the way for Europe to rule over us. It is time for us all for an awakening. We must not harm ourselves any more.

O H Kabir Dhaka

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.

"The violence of absences..."

Sir, With great displeasure, sorrow and despair, we went through the article titled 'The violence of absences and silences' in the 30th September issue of your esteemed daily. We again take the opportunity of offering our thanks to the writer Mr Azhar Hussein for focusing on such a heinous crime committed in a Bangladeshi village. Unfortunately, the author has not even mentioned the name of the place of occurrence i.e.

union, thana, district or locality. However this needs to be noticed by all sections of people and as such we would request the author to publish such stories more widely so that many more readers come across the fact of menacing tortures committed upon our helpless girls.

The matter is to be taken up by Human Rights Commission for a thorough enquiry and to thrust an exemplary punishment upon the torturer. Allah has said to his messenger Muhammad (S.M.) that Satan reflects its character and be-

haviour through evil spirited man and in a way the torturer Salmat falls within this range.

The tragedy reminds us about the abduction of Shab Meher of Narayanjan who finally succumbed to her injuries at a hospital. We would request the learned author for sending the news of this incident to our popular TV programme 'Drishti Kon' or 'Antaranga' so that the authorities take up the case with great urgency.

Md. Shaikat Osman and Md. Abdul Khaleque Mogbazar, Dhaka

Israel-PLO

Sir, There is little scope for rejoicing at the agreement between Israel and PLO because it is very clear that the pasties to the agreement have been treated unequally by USA and other powers, — who forced

Arab people to pay for the sins committed by Hitler in the Second World War. We all know, Britain is the main architect of Israel and it is the country which virtually betrayed Arab people, from cushy days.

We cannot be happy at the agreement between Israel and PLO because it admits the right of physically stranger nations of the world and forces weak people forego their right to make room for outsiders in the way the white people captured USA, Australia and New Zealand.

Is there none to place justice above physical power, in the international arena? Devuan Ahmed Kabir Choudhury Sylhet

Nogorno-Karabakh

Sir, It appears that both Armenia and Azerbaijan are trying to make a mountain of a