

Matter of Genuine Initiative

The Parliament session gets underway drawing a blank on the opposition boycott persisting even to this day on the question of a caretaker government to conduct the next general election.

There is a confusing entanglement of dates and approaches that cast a long shadow over the prospects for ending the political impasse.

This smacks of a tactical see-saw approach by those who ought to take the leading initiative to break the deadlock as the ruling party.

The latest indications here are that both the government and the opposition are willing to hold a dialogue.

An Unusual Crime

One act of crime, however heinous, cannot be used as an ideal peg to hang a case of deterioration of the general security situation of our citizens.

Top people in our society are doubly or trebly secured against house-breakers. First, their houses have built-in security.

Why are guards and numerous servants employed if they keep an open house for any determined group coming up with pistols and daggers.

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Mr Justice Masud and his wife must have undergone a most traumatising nightmare. We pray for their early recovery from the shock as we expect the police to do an early and efficient work of nabbing all the culprits.

All the pomp and extravagance surrounding the lavish party thrown by Reza Shah Pahlavi known as Shahinshah (king of kings) and Aryamehr, (light of the Aryans) to mark the 2500th anniversary of the original Persian empire in 1971 could not mask the dangers, splits and tensions bursting at seams.

What culminated in this fateful tragedy of a powerful king bustling with pomp and grandeur is a point that needs analysis and introspection by all concerned with the task of running the statecraft.

In the years following 1971, the Shah's megalomania grew more unrestrained and a kind of frenzied insanity gripped the ruler of Iran.

Despite the size of the crowd, however, this August's massive protest may not prove the unalloyed success of the previous rally.

The demonstration was part of a worldwide attempt by the Vatican to mobilise opinion against the international conference on population which takes place in Cairo from September 5 to 13.

Domestically, it was an attempt to derail President Fidel Ramos' commitment to contraception in the face of the country's rapid population growth — about 2.5 per cent a year — which Ramos believes is blocking the Philippines' efforts to become an Asian economic Tiger.

But there are suspicions that the Archbishop is using the Cairo issue to recoup his own reduced prestige and influence.

Sin lost clout when he backed the wrong candidate in the 1992 election in which Ramos who became the first Protestant president in Asia's only predominantly Catholic country.

The government's clear line that it respects the rights of individuals to use any family planning method except abortion comes in the wake of years of dithering and policy changes over contraception.

The Church also opposes a government drive for the use

The Fall of the Shah and Ceausescu: A Grim Reminder for Third World Countries

by Md Asadullah Khan

billions worth of the most sophisticated weapons in the American army were procured to boost up the Shah's image as a ruler of unprecedented strength.

Good sense prevailed in the Shah. The besieged ruler himself faced with rebellion and counselled by his advisers to marshal his military muscle, chose to flee rather than spill the blood of his people sticking to the fantasy that Iran would soon call him back.

Development Bank put aside over 20 years of reticence to adopt a population policy aimed at reducing fertility rates in the Asia-Pacific region.

A Philippine study submitted to the World Health Organization in 1987 estimated that between 155,000 and 750,000 abortions are carried out every year.

The government does not and will not back abortion but supports many parts of the proposed Cairo declaration, which proponents see as a turning point for the rights of women around the world and the Vatican views as a challenge to its doctrine on the sanctity of life and family.

The Philippines has reasons to support the Cairo document, which could lead to more pledges of funding for family planning programmes.

In an effort to diffuse Church-State tension, officials and bishops met for two days in mid-August and agreed a draft statement for the Philippine delegation to Cairo.

The on-going debate in the country reached a climax just as the Manila-based Asian

to all of us, the one time king of kings was forced to conceal his identity for fear that assassins might track him out and so in New York Hospital he became "David Newsome".

Distancing himself from the people and going ahead with the so-called 'reform and welfare' programme for the people, Nicolae Ceausescu, another world-class dictator, of Romania invited his own gloom. Ceausescu loved creating monuments to his rule.

birth rate nearly doubled but poor nutrition and inadequate pre-natal care endangered many pregnant women. Children were born into a system that could not care for them.

On the other front, people were kept on a low ration of food stuffs overtly denying them nutritional facilities while stock piling of huge quantities of food and consumer goods for export.

Ceausescu was captured and he and his wife faced trial in a summary military court that ended its proceedings in just two hours and handed down death sentence for the Ceausescus that was carried

out immediately by an over-the-hill firing squad vying to have the first chance.

Historical parallels are, of course, never exact. But striking similarities are emerging from the uprising in Iran, Romania and lately, in 1990, in Bangladesh when the students and other classes of people, regardless of their political and ideological affiliations, took to streets and ousted ex-President General Ershad.

Reports have it that the electronic hardware included a set of switches that would have enabled the dictator to detonate explosives placed at key locations around Bucharest.

To help governments slow this growth, the Bank has adopted a three-pronged strategy: women's education, enhancement of women's welfare by protecting their reproductive health and rights, and

within the next 25 years. Maguire argued that the document's negotiators were working against a background of dwindling fish stocks, an increase in erosion of arable soils, a slowdown in the rate of increase of food production and rapid rises in population.

These kinds of trends are forcing countries to think about how to slow the growth of populations, he said.

The United Nations has estimated that there are now 5,660 million people in the world and projects that the number will rise to 8,500 million by 2050.

He said there was a remarkable amount of agreement so far on the proposed Cairo document, including creating programmes for the empowerment of women, protection of children, greater aid from industrialized countries and abolition of poverty.

The only area of disagreement is on safe contraception and abortion being made more widely available and only with the Vatican, several other Roman Catholic countries and perhaps a few Muslim states, he said.

But the Vatican and a hand-

upto the present time do contain some warnings that are applicable till to day. That shows, for example, that when any revolution overthrows a solidly entrenched despotism, at first all the regime's enemies join hands in the struggle.

But the grim reminder is: New hatreds have been etched in blood and this will kindle new violence. No wonder, the nation can ill afford to allow religious antagonism, ethnic tension, extremist movement to prop up so menacingly at the cost of national unity, cohesion and, above all, development so badly needed for the country.

Sin's Flock Take to the Streets over Cairo Conference

Abby Tan writes from Manila

The worldwide campaign by the Vatican against the forthcoming international conference on population and development took a spectacular form in The Philippines, when the Archbishop of Manila persuaded hundreds of thousands of people to take to the streets in protest.



Jaime Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila: Calling out the people

of condoms to combat the spread of the disease AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

National surveys have indicated that the Church is losing influence on family planning, and indeed on other issues. Many Filipinos have indicated a desire for birth control and only a minority oppose artificial contraception.

A statement by more than 20 women's organisations noted that while women are most affected by the dispute between the Church hierarchy and the government over population policy, "they do not bother to listen to what we have to say."

It condemned the "viciousness and moral terrorism employed by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and the insensitivity of government to the realities of women who have undergone abortion,

should be held accountable for the thousands of lives lost due to unsafe abortion practices."

Although abortion is illegal, Florence Tadiar, a professor at the University of the Philippines College of Public Health, says the problem is more widespread than many people realise.

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Panel of Theologians Say Population Conference is Pro-family

A panel of theologians and religious leaders has strongly defended international proposals to slow population growth as a moral effort to save the lives of women and children and to strengthen the family, says a USIS release dated in Washington, August 28.

The reverend Dr Gordon Sommers, president of the National Council of Churches, composed of most of the major US Protestant denominations, said August 24 that the upcoming International Conference on Population and Development is trying to expand access of women and children to education and health programmes.

Better education and family planning services would strengthen the family, he said in reply to a question during a news conference called to counter criticism of the international conference by the Vatican and some Muslim theologians.

Delegates from 180 countries are expected at the conference sponsored by the United Nations to be held in Cairo, Egypt September 5-13. The countries have reached a great deal of agreement in the three years of negotiations leading up to the conference.

But the Vatican and a hand-

ful of heavily Roman Catholic countries, joined in recent weeks by leaders of Al Azhar Islamic University in Cairo, one of the world centres of Muslim learning, have charged that the draft of an agreement to be discussed at the Cairo conference condones extra-marital sex and would permit easier access to abortion, thereby undermining the cohesiveness of the family.

"I don't accept that," Sommers said. Programmes proposed in the draft agreement have been designed to help families cope with poverty, illiteracy and the desire to limit family size, he said.

Rabbi Balfour Brickner, former director of international relations for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the organization of Reform Jewish congregations, said that one of the few references to abortion in the draft document is that it be safe and rare.

Daniel Maguire, professor of moral theology at Marquette University, said that the document talks about the primacy of the family.

"There is nothing that indicates a call for promiscuous lifestyles, indeed on the contrary," he said.

Brickner said that the document makes clear that it is

provision of better family planning services.

The Bank also announced that it had begun a campaign to raise awareness among member countries on the threat of AIDS. It will run workshops to warn members about the social and economic catastrophe that the disease is wreaking in Asia.

GEMINI NEWS

ABBY TAN is a Singaporean journalist, based in Manila since 1977, specialising in economic and political affairs.

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.

Turkey

Sir, While Belgium is the cockpit of Europe since WWI at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, where stormy Bosphorus strait separates Istanbul from Ankara, the progressive Muslim nation called sickman of Europe, strives to carve out a major role in a diverse region beset by post-cold war turmoil.

Why are guards and numerous servants employed if they keep an open house for any determined group coming up with pistols and daggers. Legends say that one Gurkha guard would be enough to keep the whole gang at bay until killed in the process.

The Banani dacoity was a very unusual crime. Mr Justice Masud and his wife must have undergone a most traumatising nightmare.

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ancient Greeks and Ramos, heart of Byzantine and Ottoman empire of 1923 shaped by Turkish father Kemal Ataturk, leading a new economic domain stretching into Central Asia. Now its first woman Prime Minister Tansu Ciller has reformed civil rights as women still handle menial chores. Discrimination is embedded in the culture, religion, profession, HR development, HDI. However, for us boosting Turkey's image abroad, success of galatasary team against Euro rivals is a point of pride from Adriatic to China Wall.

Chuliam Murshid, Dhaka

Something more is wrong

Sir, I am pleased to refer to the article captioned "Full convertibility of Taka..." (DS 19-08-94) written by Mr Nital C Nag. And earlier I had some misgivings which was proved accurate vide the report "India okays US \$15 billion foreign investment" (DS 20-8-94). What Mr Nag claimed

regarding the bias of foreign capital investment towards the stock market, citing India as an example, the newsreport of 20-08-1994 amply proved it to be wide off the mark.

The entire foreign investment there has been done in the industrial sector as whatever investment pertaining to the stock market had long ceased with the exposure of the notorious security scam, perennially raging at regular intervals. And one of what is holding back the foreign investment in Bangladesh, is the cost of utilities, which is one of the highest in the world.

With the repeated negative attitude of the WB and other lending agencies to the power sector from 1989 onwards reaching to the end result of perennial load-shedding and with the unbridled increase in naked plunder in the name of system loss, and then with the sword of Democles hanging as threat for further rise in the power rates, will any sane element venture to invest?

This includes both the local and the foreign variety, especially when the Japanese trade delegation on both their visits not only tasted a massive

breakdown in power grid but also down to dusk hantals which literally brought the nation to its knees.

Today our entire banking sector reportedly is bulging with unutilised funds, due to the unwillingness of our entrepreneurs to invest. Hence, it becomes merely wishful thinking that, increasing facilities and reforms will fling open the floodgates of foreign investment. Above all else, if we still negate the political aspects of a consensus with the opposition parties, all our efforts will be frustrated. And we can perhaps never proceed with the administrative reforms which also includes the salient features of an investment-friendly bureaucracy. Today, as we see, almost the entire bureaucratic structure is either on strike or on the verge of joining the fray.

Sir, something more inherently is wrong than meets the mind's eye.

Salahuddin Jamal Firoozsha, Chittagong

Smuggled Indian eggs!

Sir, According to reports in a section of press, the poultry industry of the country has been facing serious threat due to unabated inflow of Indian poultry products in our

markets. The allegedly smuggled Indian eggs, it seems, have already captured the market obviously ousting local poultry products by resorting to the policy of "cheap price".

A good number of local poultry industries reportedly had to close their business after failing to attract the customers in the competitive market. However, some poultry owners allege that the eggs smuggled from the neighbouring country are not only inferior in quality but also small in size. And it is also alleged that a section of unscrupulous traders are trying to monopolise the poultry business by giving an indigenous colour to these eggs by dipping them in potash solution. What an irony! If it is the state of affair, one may well ask what the sentiments at our border do? And one may pessimistically surmise that the burgeoning poultry industry would be only adversely affected if the alleged smuggling continued.

N H Sufi, Mohamadpur, Dhaka

Out of sight

Sir, It took only one year for them to forget.

A senior ex-student of the Department of Architecture of BUET, wrote a letter to a weekly. In that he stressed the importance of natural beauty in our daily monotonous urban life. He wrote about the bill

boards standing proudly by the side of Dhanmondi Lake. The boards, however, fell apart under the impact of some natural calamity. They were left in that condition for some time.

Now, we again see those bill boards obstructing the beautiful views of the lake. The poetic harmony of green and water is again out of sight. A new link road has been constructed. This connects Green Road with Mirpur Road. The axis of the new link road blends with the natural view of the lake. The smooth natural beauty, green trees, silvery water line refresh our urban life. Why are we after destroying these with our own hands? There is also no need to fence the lake with rusty six feet grill. Vandalism cannot be resisted by this alone.

At the early stage only two bill boards were erected — telling everyone to contact something that read like 'Hamilton'. Now, the flute player of 'Hamilton' has gathered more and more signs overriding the natural view. And I can guess the future of this area — full of sign boards — big, small, tall, wide — a bunch of tin structures only radiating glare and heat.

Now, isn't it time for the authorities to put away those crampy structures and save the nice environment? Naser Nazul, Dept of Architecture, BUET, Dhaka