Dhaka, Wednesday, September 28, 1994

Emeka Factor

The good offices of the Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anayoku have catalyzed the chemistry of drift between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina. They have consented to having direct talks on their political differences. We welcome this first sign of the melting ice in their stand-off and, thank chief Emeka, who has made it possible with the fund of goodwill and esteem that the Commonwealth as an organisation and he as a personage enjoy among us. At the same time we cannot fail to note how we ran out of our inherent national capacity to resolve our own problem even with the benefit of a hindsight of reaching a national consensus in 1991 over the parliamentary form of government.

Coming to the three-point proposal which has reportedly been agreed to both by Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina, one finds that Emeka's envoy will act as a facilitator of the talks. This seems to have clinched the agreement from the Awami League side which favours the presence of a neutral observer as a witness to the proceedings. Basically both sides needed the services of an acceptable go-between. But one has to wait and see whether on the part of the Commonwealth Secretary General it will turn out to be hands-on mediation as the process gets underway.

On the agenda for talks, the contending parties had already veered towards taking a flexible attitude and Emeka has lent finishing touches there, of course, with a high sense of relevance and a remarkable degree of astuteness. The actual adoption of an open agenda is something that we must regard as a very positive development. Whatever is relevant to the electoral process - the question of a caretaker government and that of strengthening the Election Commission - will be addressed. Two things deserve special mention here. One, they will make an effort to hammer out an overall code of conduct to guide political activity; and two, they have agreed to commente a dialogue "in good faith" which we interpret as a positive intent expressed to break the impasse.

The third point of the Emeka proposal comes as a confidence-building measure which is but a standard practice followed during the course of all difficult negotiations across the table. At the conclusion of each session of their talks they are to issue to the press and public "an agreed joint statement only, with the participants otherwise refraining from further public comment". This is fine-tuning to the intensity of feelings on both sides which academically reminds of the cautious approach that used to characterise important pre-partition day dialogues.

Now that the political forces have opted to serious discussions on some clearly specified election-related issues, they are to exercise utmost caution to keep the atmospherics tidy and bitterness free. All sorts of provocations or doublespeak must be avoided. If the path of dialogue has been chosen, that of agitation and confrontation has to be abandoned. Some one and a half years are left for the next general election to be held. So it is in good time that we are trying to put our heads together to devise ways to perfect the electoral process. Let us utilise the intervening period in some constructive work for the people to get hold of something to judge us by in the next series of polls, likely to the freest and fairest of all.

Since all the opposition political parties have been unified in their approach to the electoral is sue, they are expected to sit for a dialogue with the government as a team, without any ado.

Bracing against Plague

Once thought to be an event of the past, plagues are again staging a come-back. Surat, an Indian city in the west, is experiencing one of the worst plagues of modern times. Officials there have claimed to have contained the spread of the disease known as pneumonic plague after five days since it was reported on Tuesday, September 20. They might well be right in their claim. But at the same time a different variety called bubonic plague has been reported from the state of Maharashtra. A 14th century disease, this latter type has already attacked 31 people, although no incident of death was reported.

One explanation of Surat coming under the spell of the deadly plague is that only last month an unprecedented flood swept the town, leaving heaps of garbage and carcasses of animals. The shanty towns with dirt and squalor were the parts worst hit and in the absence of the emergency sanitary measures that are required in the aftermath of such natural calamities, the stage might have been set for the return of a plague. It appears that the administration of the town was caught by surprise. Now that people in their hundreds of thousands have fled the city, the administration has woken up to its duties.

Mercifully though the local administration has quickly been able to bring the disease under some control, it is facing difficulty both in convincing the panic-stricken people and the municipal employees to set about the task of clearing the filth. Any delay in both the tasks may have a repercussion, leading to unimaginable consequences. If the residents of the town do not return and the municipal employees along with volunteers quickly dispose of the garbage, the germs of the contagious disease may not be totally brought under control. Yet another chance is that the residents who have fled to other town and villages might have carried the germs to further spread the disease.

Both scenarios are least desirable. At this point, we also have enough cause to be worried, for the people on this side of the border may no longer be immune from this communicable plague. The people here have as much a share of filth and natural disaster as those of the residents of Surat. We are prone to be equally hit. Our health-care system has its drawbacks. Add to this the fact that patients here are leaving hospitals because the doctors are on an indefinite strike. We must take note of the lurking danger and gird up to face any eventuality.

Trafficking in Women and Children Turns into Trade in Human Organs?

by Md Asadullah Khan

Rangpur and gouging out her eyes and kidneys portray a savage image of bestiality and at the same breath a grim Surely, the problem of a comstruggle for survival of the modity economy is that everyhelpless, impoverished and ilthing becomes a commodity. literate women of the country. even human beings. Exacer-It is' not a lone incident that bating the problem is a ratio we can dismiss it outright between the sexes that is rather it is one of the many incidents that escape the atunbalanced, in part because baby girls are often considered tention of the social elite, political leaders, proponents and a burden and abandoned by advocates of social justice, retheir parents. ligious leaders preaching

Boby, a baby girl, by

Bilkis Ara, her mother

in the remotest part of

equity, justice and fair play

keeping themselves closeted

recent times, more thoroughly

invaded our imagination than

this one on Bilkis Ara who

and broken marriage drove

Bilkis to desperation, as trad-

ing on her own child's organs

and limbs. Husband's torture

and pressure for money

wrenching poverty of her par

ents and total lack of sympathy

and understanding of a life full

of humiliation and ignominy

and lastly starvation for days

and weeks often throw Bilkis

and her likes to resort to such

gruesome crimes. Stories like

Bilkis Ara's are becoming all

too familiar these days in the

country's impoverished re-

gions. Many incidents of such

appalling nature go unre-

ported. But it is a common

knowledge that these days, in

ness of the male members of

the family and vanishing re-

sources from the little agricul-

tural land they once owned.

due to natural and man made

ravages, many a husband is in-

flicting punishments of savage

nature on the wife for extract-

ing money from the in-law's

and selling women were com-

mon in times long past. But

with access to modern tech-

nology and a big leap in surgi-

cal technique and transplant

surgery, the horrendous trade

in human organs have fueled a

get-rich at-any-price mentality.

TT THEN Zambian Presi-

rnment leaders to sacrifice

some of their widely criticised

privileges to help the country's'

poor. Dipak Patel was one of

his leader - who gives

K100,000 of his monthly pay

back to the state - Patel has

gone further, giving all his

salary to his Lusaka Central

Parliamentary constituency for

million to date, the Minister of

Commerce. Trade and Indus-

try has been able to complete a

primary school expansion

programme in Bauleni shanty

compound and start bringing

electricity into homes in the

"I am looking at basic issues

in my constituency including

water and electricity which are

critical to improve people's

standards of living, as well as

rehabilitation of infrastructure

like schools and roads," Patel

A Zambian of Indian parent-

age. Patel's fame is helping

change the long-held view

among many in this country

that Indians, because of their

role in commerce, are only

Clanging that view has not

pech easy. Many minority

Zambians - European or

Indian - have long been kept

on the margins of society both

politically and economically

sectors of the economy was

Nationalisation of main

until the past few years.

interested in making money.

same impoverished area.

With a total donation of K4

development purposes.

Following the example of

the few to get the message.

dent Frederick Chilu-

ba asked fellow gove-

The practice of abducting

the village, because of jobless-

Chill penury, deprivation

headlined in some dailies.

No other news item has in

in comfortable surroundings.

Side by side, with this new variety of trade in human organs, in recent times, women and child-trafficking in our country has reached an alarming proportion. Police raid and surveillance are lax and in many cases the gangs allegedly operate with the assistance and cooperation of such people as are supposed to help curb such criminal activities. On the other side, most of the worten who are abducted are poor uneducated and travelling out side their home for the first time. Should they try to flee from the men who either purchased them or enticed them with offer of employment, they may be held prisoners. In that case also, reportedly, the excesses and humiliation they have to suffer in police custody often exceed the torments they have in the other way. And so the menacing trade flourishes unhindered in the country.

China Instance

There are countries outside Bangladesh where such degrading trade like 'womentrafficking is also prevalent but the most astute and stringent measures they have taken to curb such menace is worth noting. Alarmed by the severity of the problem, Beijing has launched a vigorous campaign against 'selling' of women which it has classified as one of the "six evils" along with prostitution, pornography, gambling, drug trafficking, and what it calls feudal superstition (consulting fortune tellers and the like). During a fifteen-day crackdown in the province of Shandong in 1991, city and country officials were called in the governor's office and told that they would be held responsible if they fail to take action. During the period. 170 women and children were rescued, 859 middlemen arrested and 82 gangs broken up. In China, under a law that became effective in early 1992, those trafficking in women and children may be sentenced to prison terms of five to ten years and fined as much as \$1860, and those who may obstruct official attempts to rescue victims will be liable for prison sentences of up to five years. In the most serious trafficking cases, capital punishment has been imposed. In one such case, a farmer known to be involved in the flesh trade was tried and executed a 23 year old woman he had sold committed suicide after she was raped by the man who

China's example serves as a model of the law that the sovereign parliament in our country may enact to put an end to this menacing flesh

had bought her.

Nonetheless, it will not be enough to bring only a few demons to justice by enacting stringent laws. The battle has to be continued far beyond this stray fields of operation. Empowering women and strengthening them with proper education could only yield the desired result. As long as the country borders on impoverishment, women are uneducated and considered burdens with no financial assistance available from them for the family which at the same time is adding up mouths to be fed, women folk by and large will continue to be victims of oppression, repression and brutality and this menacing trend of women-trafficking, child-trafficking, kidnapping, abduction and trading of

human limbs and organs will continue. And how exhilarating it is to note the enormous strength that a woman can summon through education Put in the words of a Canadian woman working as an assistant in a business firm, "Fourteen years ago in Montreal I was given 10 minutes time to decide whether I wanted to be the company president's mistress or lose the job as his assistant, I told him 10 minutes was too long to think about it. I left immediately not even worrying about my badly needed pay check."

International Adoption

International trafficking in children for adoption remains a big business in countries like Srt Lanka, India, Thailand, the Philippines and South Korea in the Asian region extending up to Columbia, Guatemala, Peru, Chile in the Latin American region and Romania in the East European block. In absence of official sanction of the government and largely because of the socio cultural and religious adherence of our people to strict value system, official level transactions are not permissible but proliferation of the trade often under cover of law has gone up in a menacing proportion. Unsurprisingly, much more egregious cases of cross-bor der transfer of women and children are taking place with just a paltry sum of money soing perhaps to the mother who might have sold her child to stave off starvation.

In Sri Lanka, only a year ago, police acting on a tip-off raided a hotel and found 20 women with 22 infant babies. some just a few weeks old. The hotel was known as a "baby farm" where foreigners looking for a child to adopt could come and for a fee of \$ 1000 to \$5000 have their pick. The young mothers, all desperatelypoor, would get to keep about

\$50 in exchange for each of their babies. Every year unscrupulous lawyers and baby brokers in the poorest region of Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe reportedly hand over hundreds, perhaps thousands of children to North American and West European parents willing to pay large sums for healthy children and offering to ignore evidence that the youngsters were obtained under suspicious circumstances.

Extensive hunting and investigation and watchfulness have unravelled the links surrounding this trade. It has been established that there are "extensive" child-trafficking networks around the world. And how is it that lawyers and notaries, social workers, hospitals, doctors, children's institutes, among others, work together to obtain children and make a profit out of the despair of parents! In Thatland 4,000 young boys are sold every year and shipped to Malaysia. These boys are adopted by middle-class couples looking for a male heir but sometimes sold as new recruits for the criminal gangs that roam the Thai-Malaysian border.

The grey and black markets in children do not always involve transactions between the First and the Third world. In China the government's one child policy has created a thriving commerce inside the country for the sale of children, especially boys to childless couples or families with only girls.

As it appears, given the disparity of wealth in the world. commerce in children for now is all unstoppable. Because as long as there are poor parents who desire a better future for themselves and their children, child-trafficking can never be completely eliminated. Speaking about the feelings of the children themselves, for those facing a life of poverty and social stigma, foreign adoption is godsent, something that may save their lives.

The arguments advanced in favour of inter-country adoption are: Over here in the poor countries of Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, there are millions of children in need of food, clothing, education and stable homes. And over there in well-off industrialised countries there are tens of thousands of couples and single people desperately yearning to have a child and affluent enough to give it the kind of life Third World par-

Demographic Safety!

ents can only dream of.

Advocates further emphasise the fact that it opens demographic safety values in countries that have more people than they can feed and house; that it creates a constituency for aid to the Third World: that it shrinks the global village and makes every one feel more dependent on one another. However strong and nicely worded the rhetorics might be, socio-cultural and religious bias inhibits such policies to hold sway in our country and there is a strong apprehension that once we have allowed proliferation of this trade in any way, the country would be cut adrift from its moorings. After all, wealth does not entitle any one to the children of the poor. International adoption is an undeserved benefit that has fallen to the rich in the West and North because of the inequitable socio-economic circumstances in which the poor live in, in the East and South.

In the long run, we ought to be changing these circumstances. And based on such a perfect equation of need and want, the adoption process that operates on a global basis can hardly find support in our country because the moral quandary surrounding this trade can not be brushed off. And think of the new menace of trade in human organs, that makes its way in the process! One simple shudders at such consequences.

Working for Free Earns Minister Respect

Venarcious Mwansa writes from Lusaka

Throughout his life, Zambian Cabinet minister Dipak Patel has fought against the injustice that comes with being a minority member of society. Gemini News Service profiles the man who is remembering the disadvantaged despite his position of power.



Dipak Patel: 'Zambia is my own country'

carried out side-by-side with the wholesale "Zambianisation" of influential posts. It is understood that over 90 per cent of shops the government of President Kenneth Kaunda confiscated under the 1986 Emergency Powers Act and the Preservation of Public Security Act belonged to Indo-Zambians.

Such feelings of animosity were carried over when Patrick Katyoka, a founding member of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) filed a court injunction to restrain Patel from holding a cabinet post, charging that he was not a Zambian. Chiluba had just appointed him Information and Broadcasting Services Minister.

The scenario has changed now as Patel's work is being proved to be even more inward looking.

Patel, born in Lusaka in 1953, once held dual citizenship: Zambian as well as Canadian. Asked why he denounced his Canadian citizenship where he could likely have had a much better standard of living than in povertystricken Zambia, Patel says: "Zambia is my own country, my birth place and I am happy to have a ministerial portfolio which has put me in a far much better position to help

resuscitate the economy." The oldest child in a family of five, Patel is a successful businessman running a number of companies. When business became difficult and politics uncertain during the Kaunda regime, he emigrated to Canada whose passport he only gave up when Zambia reversed

to multiparty politics. Immediately after MMD came to power, Patel was appointed deputy minister of Commerce. Trade and

Industry then promoted to Ministry of Information.

He did not stay at the Information Ministry long as he was moved to the ministry of Sport, Youth and Child Development before moving back to the Ministry of Commerce.

Unlike other politicians who have been accused of taking advantage of their position for personal gain, Patel says he has been and will continue to use his political influence to coax friends to donate funds towards improvement of facilities in his constituency.

Despite all this, Patel is not without critics. He says he has received complaints from "other parts" of the constituency that he is concentrating too much attention

on Bauleni compound. And within Bauleni compound itself some residents feel their dream to have electrified homes is taking long to come true. "It was like a dream when Patel told us at the rally barely months after he was elected as our member of parliament that every house in Bauleni will be provided with electricity when the owners pay K10,000," says one resident. "We paid the money late last year but up to now nothing has happened. I am afraid

might not live to see electric-

ity in my house." In turn Patel says criticisms of this nature are just as old as the electrification programme itself. He says when he promised his electorate to help, there was suspicion and scepticism and when after

three months there was no sign of activity it merely seemed to confirm some people's feelings. On charges that he is con-

centrating too much on one area. Patel admits it is not possible for him to cover the whole constituency. But he is optimistic he will use his influence in this area as well to ask for council assistance especially in provision of water supply which he says is a major issue requiring state funding. (Exchange rate: \$1=1,050

VENARCIOUS MWANSA is a

Zambian freelance journalist.

OPINION

"Of Fanaticism and Fundamentalism" Unfortunately, some mis-

I have read with great interest the article by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed on fanaticism and fundamentalism published in The Daily Star on 17:9.94. He has been successful in clearing some of the confusions prevailing on the subject. I congratulate him for this. But a lot more needs to be clari-

Initially the term fundamentalism was applied to a Protestant Christian Movement that took place in America in the early part of the twentieth century. It was confined to Christianity only. As I recall, after Ayatullah Khomeini and his group took over the administration of Iran following the ouster of of Shah, the western media called them fundamentalists. Later, again the same media called FIS of Algeria who were denied the results of popular elections of that country, the present regime in the Sudan, and some splinter groups who have been trying to exert themselves in several Central Asian Republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union, also fundamentalists. All these peoples happen to be Muslims. Normally we call people who wish to go by the words of scriptures as conser-

Looking at the situation it appears whenever the conservatives of a country plan to take over the administration of that country, they are branded as fundamentalists. In our own country the liberal or non-conservative political parties have also fallen in the queue. They call the religion-based parties fundamentalist. Actually in our social and political life the word 'fundamentalist' is being used rather as an abusive term than a political concept. But as Mr Alauddin Ahmed has explained, the term fundamentalist is a respectable word to the extent it is applied to Muslims in general. The Holy Quran declares in verse 33:36

It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Apostle, to have any option about their decision. If anyone disobeys God and His Apostle, he is indeed

clearly on a wrong path. Therefore, a believing and practising Muslim cannot but be a fundamentalist

conceptions about the injunctions of Islam are going around creating problems in our social and political life. For example, some people are saying, "Mr X is a 'murtad'! So he should be hanged." Technically, 'murtad', is a person who converts to Islam from some other faith or dogma and then reneges on it. The persons who have abused Islam, as I know, are agnostics or atheists. The fact that Mr X has an Arabic name does not mean that he is a Muslim. So the question of Mr X being a 'murtad' does not arise, as he has been a non-believer throughout. If a person abuses Islam, he is to be dealt with as per laws of the land. Besides, for hanging a 'murtad' we have to introduce Shariat Laws in the country which we do not have at present. But at the same time it must be made clear that it is obligatory on every Muslim to try to establish Shariat Laws in the country where he lives, vide the instruction of verse 5:48 of the Holy Quran —

And if any fail to judge by the light of what God has revealed, they are no better than unbelievers.

It may not be possible to establish Shariat Laws in a country where Muslims are in minority, but where Muslim are in majority it can be done. Therein lies the possibility for establishing peace. According to late Professor Arnold Toynbee of the Oxford University, a famous historian of this century, to establish peace and justice in the world Islam may play its historical role again. Let us pray and hope it does.

There is no scope for fanaticism in Islam. Every bit of the teachings of Islam is to be understood and practised with reason and patience. Islam abhors extremism. In fact is recommends moderation in everything as Mr Alauddin has mentioned. However, one has to be very cautious while criticising 'ulemas' who are supposed to be inheritors of the Prophets as mentioned in the Holy Quran. It is extremism of a kind to make sweeping comments against the entire ulema community. In fact, it

borders on fanaticism. Mohammad Yusuf Zikatala, Dhaka

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.

Trees

Sir. The Daily Star's editorial on 9.9.94 highlighted the laudable activities of the DC of Sherpur who has been dubbed as "Gachh Pagol DC" by his numerous ádmirers.

Ordinarily I would have joined this throng had it not been for the fact that while one may plant as many trees as one may like, it is an entirely different story when in due course of time one wants to harvest even one of the trees legally. Then the full might of officialdom falls on your neck with their insufferable load of red tape.

And sad to say that departments under the DCs give full. weight to the illogical, unreasonable, and sometimes even ridiculous laws, rules and regulations which govern the harvesting of one's trees as per the Forest Act 1972. .

To illustrate, please allow me to narrate my sad story: From 1979, I planted nearly 100,000 trees on 30 acres of eroded and barren hills near Chittagong. By 1990 it had turned into a pristine forest in sharp contrast to the surrounding 'protected and reserve forests'. When I applied to the Forest Deptt to harvest 5,000 mature trees, it was referred to the DC, Ctg to certify that I was the actual owner of the land. Even though the original documents were always carried by me and photostat copies were enclosed, it took five months and 27 trips to the top of Court Bldgs to get this certification. The fact that I am 62 years old, in ill health and had to climb over 300 steps each time did not weigh much with the learned ADC (Rev) at the time, who also looked upon me if I was going to commit a 'crime' and upbraided me for wanting to cut down so many trees which he said "produce oxygen".

He was not at all amused when I retorted that in that case I should be paid for the oxygen which my trees were producing and which everyone, including the learned ADC himself, was breathing for free.

To cut a long story short, as it has already been narrated many times over the last 5 years, the Forest Deptt led me a merry dance for over 2 years with their Forms A, B, C, D, E

& F and work plans and references to the DC's "secret select committee", which mysteriously decides 'in camera' how many of my trees I could harvest without even giving me a Ultimately when my trees

were on the verge of death due to old age, I got a permit (No. 2 of 1991) for just 2,500 trees. The 24-page permit contains many ludicrous clauses which are apparently against the laws of human right, the laws of nature and one which is even against the law of gravity (trees cut on top of hills must remain there and are not allowed to roll down).

In disgust and to save myself and my family from total ruination I have had to abandon my plantation which was very conservatively valued in 1992 at over Tk 1 crore. When I visited my farm last month found that almost all trees above 6" dia have already been cut down illegally. I estimate more than 30,000/40,000 trees have been removed. My questions to the authorities are: How is this possible when legally it is almost impossible to harvest one's trees on one's own land? What were the numerous check-posts on the road to Chittagong doing? How is it that one never sees a sawmill closing due to lack of trees? Where do all these trees come from? How many permits do the Forest authorities

issue during the year to own-

ers of trees and for how many

trees or cft of timber? Will the DC of Sherpur also keep quiet just like the Forest Deptt has done for the last five vears?

S Sikander Ahmed 390/6 BACHSL Adabor, Dhaka

'Hoping for the Best...."

Sir, Your editorial titled "Hoping for the Best in Haiti" on 20 September was indeed a unique piece of writing for the serious readers in assessing the importance of global politics and diplomacy on earth The role of the former US President Jimmy Carter in defusing the international tension is like that of a wise statesman to avert blood bath in Haiti. Senator Jam Nunn and retired General Colin Powell deserve special thanks from all of us nationally and internationally.

Now it is the high time for the multi-national forces to work for peace and democratic values in Haiti under the protective umbrella of the UN.

The barrel of the gun can never solve any human crisis on earth. It is a pity that for the lust for power we are fighting each other to hurt ourselves and increase our untold miseries and sufferings everywhere on earth today.

May Allah bless the decision-makers to preserve peace and tranquillity on earth.

Proj Abul Ashraf Noor Pabna