

Talks Fail

Sir Ninian-facilitated' talks may have failed, but we would still like to believe that the process of dialogue will continue and that some amicable solution will still be found. This we say, not because we have reasons to be optimistic, but because we are afraid to be pessimistic. That is perhaps because, we realise as our readers do, the price our poor and deprived people are going to have to pay as a consequence of any failure. Sir Ninian, in his press statement said that there existed a 'basis of a settlement', and 'that at this stage more united the parties, than divided them.' But obviously our political leaders did not think so, and hence the parting of ways, at least at this stage. It is our hope that, with the collapse of talks, the political parties will not start blaming each other and pointing accusing fingers at the opponent. What we need now is a distancing of ourselves from the immediate past events, take a step back and try to see how best to move on from here. The very first thing we urge our political leaders to do is to hold their patience and not to start a propaganda campaign of who is responsible for the breakdown of the current talks. We must retain whatever goodwill there still is between the contending parties and build on them, if building is at all possible. Let not the politics of acrimony and mutual accusation take over that of talks and searching for solutions.

The point cannot be over-emphasized that that the current political turmoil is sapping people's energies, and leading to a deep rooted sense of insecurity. Are we once again about to prove that our politicians cannot solve problems that face the nation, they can only add to them? Let us try to prove that this fear, which is widespread, is baseless.

As for Sir Ninian, we thank him for having brought our contending political parties to the talking table and 'facilitating' a dialogue, though it did not produce any results. We would like to register our appreciation for his efforts. We believe that though the talks have failed at this stage, his efforts at bringing them together will not be all lost, and that some of the points of convergence that he helped to bring out will be used to build upon, and bring about the amicable solution that the nation so eagerly awaits.

Terribly Scaring

This terrible shocker would possibly draw a blank. That the revelation made by no less responsible a person than the president of the NGO Forum about a decrease in the physical height of our people could fail to discomfort or disturb even the ones who are in the driving seat, of both the material and spiritual kind of the nation, should be a worse shock than the frightening news itself.

This state is for man, and this society. This government and its ranks of armed and civilian enforcers of law and order, this industry of workers and entrepreneurs and these cities with their glitzy market places are all for man. The farmer tends his field and the weaver works his loom. The women groom the progeny — all for man. So that man may live. And prosper. And grasp the world and reach for the sky — questing for fulfilment through evolving a social bonding ensuring fullness of life. Dr Fazl Hasan Abed's revelation on Saturday speaks volumes about all establishment and institution and activity in our nation coming to nothing, for man as a species is decaying in our dear land.

For sure this has been an accumulated result of generations of malnutrition — hunger, plainly — and also insanitary conditions and ways of life which contribute bigly to malnutrition and its effects. For sure it has been happening relentlessly for decades while, specially from the 60s, urban population all over the globe kept on gaining in height. The shrivelling of man in Bangladesh no matter by how many centimetres, is a kind of grand total for all that attends the condition of man in this land. One only hopes the bases for Dr Abed's observation are grounded well in quality statistics and are in a shape to yield many more insights into the human situation here.

The physical decay of a population is largely measurable. The government would be well-advised to set up a mechanism for keeping a permanent tab on this and improve continuously upon the devices and kinds of measurement of such. There is, however, a scarier aspect to this ethnic decay business than the physical one. Protein deficiency affecting a population for generations is sure to result in neural degeneration — lowering the IQ level nationally and ethnically.

This brings us to the question we would like not to face: Are we in the process of bringing into earth a truly *inferior* race of humans, for the first time in history, through our all-round bankruptcy in politics and economy, culture and education, mores and values? Are we? Are we not? Irrespective of party belongings, religious affiliation and class identity?

The Beauty Double

The Sun City pageant had a much longer and bigger media build-up than the Manila show crowded by Sushmita. It was part of a pariah South Africa marching regally into the comity of nations — with as much bang as was in its power. The build-up was geared to generating a suspense that grew into a regular fever. Then came the stunner. Aishwarya Rai, the reigning Miss India, has been named Miss World. This is perhaps the first time that both the titles, originating in US, the other in UK, have been pocketed by the same nation. What does this improbable double add materially to the many sided entity called India? Or even culturally? Nothing possibly.

And what doesn't it add, indeed? Everything. Ego satisfaction, confidence, international image uplift and so on so forth. Doesn't this unsubstantial double-score in fact signify the coming of age of India as a world nation?

Sushmita was a Bengali which Aishwarya is not? One cheer less for her then? Not really, who would want to be that unsporting! Some may be already wondering as to which of the two crowns is weightier. Universe is somewhat bigger than world in space terms. True. But world is no less than the universe in human and idea terms. Is beauty a spatial phenomenon? Is it purely national?

It has been a welcome development that these shows now look for Athene too in the Aphrodite whom humanity has ever been dying for. The personality factor is now being prized and is it not personality rather than brawny parameters that put beauty into a human frame?

Full Text of Sir Ninian's Press Statement

'Commonwealth will Not Abandon Bangladesh'

AS you are probably aware, Lady Stephen and I will be leaving Bangladesh very soon. I will be making a full written report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. Unfortunately, barring unforeseen and unlikely developments in the next 24 hours, I will not be able to report a successful outcome to my mission and, in recognition of this, I have regrettably come to the conclusion that my continued presence in Dhaka will serve no useful purpose.

Naturally, I do not wish to leave without making a statement to the members of the media. However, I will not be answering any questions, nor will I be elaborating on or adding to this statement in any way before my departure.

First, my wife and I wish to extend our thanks to the people of Bangladesh for the friendship and warmth you have all shown us during our stay in your beautiful and fascinating country and for the facilities extended to us during our stay. I am most grateful to the staff of the Foreign Ministry, to Mr Mowlia, my Liaison Officer, the members of your police service and, of course, the staff of the Meghna State Guest House, for all their consideration and kindness.

Sir Ninian Stephen, the envoy of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who came to Bangladesh to assist in the dialogue process between the Government and the Opposition, spoke to the press at a conference held at the Padma Guest House on November 20, before his departure.

The people of Bangladesh are among the most hospitable and kindly people I have ever met. You, the people, are the great strength of this country, a strength which you must never undervalue and which will win for Bangladesh a great future provided that wisdom and tolerance can prevail and you can rise above both past enemies and the political problems of the present.

Bangladesh is at a crucial stage in its development and you desperately need conditions of peace, social stability and political harmony. If you can attain them, and they are within your grasp today, you can then concentrate on building, for the present generation and for the generations to come, that future of security, prosperity and fulfilment which Bangladesh deserves and which your people's resilience, industry and enterprise so richly merit. That is why I was so eager to ensure the success of my mission and am so disappointed that I have not succeeded in doing so. That is also why I hope that there can still be a peaceful

and speedy resolution of the issues that today divide your political parties.

Secondly, I wish to thank you, the members of the press, for your courtesy to myself and my staff and to congratulate you on the vivid displays of imagination which have featured on your front pages as you sought to piece together what has been going on. I know that this has not been an easy period for you. Necessarily, I have not been as forthcoming as you would have wished during the dialogue process and I am aware of the frustration that this has caused you. I am grateful to you for respecting the way in which I have had to work.

As you are aware, I have been in Bangladesh as the Envoy of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, and in pursuance of the Three-point Proposal he submitted to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition during his visit to Bangladesh in September, a proposal which was subsequently accepted by

both sides. That resulted in the process of dialogue in which I have been happy to assist. I am of course deeply disappointed, especially when there seemed to me to be the basis for a settlement, that no agreement arising out of this dialogue has yet proved possible. However, I nevertheless believe that at this stage it more unites the parties than divides them. After many conversations with all concerned, I put forward further proposals which I am confident that, if agreed and properly implemented, would address the concerns of both sides, thereby permitting a resolution of the current impasse.

I am happy that one side, that is, the government (previous four words were added during delivery) has indicated its willingness to accept the proposals and I hope that further reflection on their merits and their wider implications will lead to their adoption and to a way forward. Accordingly, I hope that my proposals will remain on the table and that both parties will

in time, feel able to return to them.

The primary responsibility for resolving the political crisis here will, as ever, remain with you, the people of Bangladesh. I hope and believe that it may yet be possible for the issues that divide the parties to be resolved and for normal political activity to resume.

While my own role may have come to an end, I know that the Commonwealth still stands ready to assist the people of Bangladesh and your political parties. The Commonwealth will not abandon Bangladesh. I will be recommending to the Commonwealth Secretary-General that the Commonwealth should not only continue to closely monitor the situation here but should also remain ready to assist the parties in their search for a peaceful settlement. I know that the Secretary-General will respond positively to that recommendation and that the Commonwealth will continue to do whatever it can to bring about a resumption in the process of dialogue.

When I arrived I said that

the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition had seized a significant opportunity to promote the process of dialogue. That opportunity remains. Suspicion and mistrust are both deep and strong. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the parties did come together and did conduct a rational debate.

This much can be said with certainty that violence and uproar will achieve nothing. I urge the people of this country not to go down that road, which leads only to anguish and despair. Through discussions between the parties the prevailing atmosphere of confrontation and tension can still be dispelled, normal political activity can still be restored, confidence in the institutions of democracy in Bangladesh can still be consolidated. I leave with the hope that your leaders will yet find a way to secure success in the vital, continuing and, I hope, ultimately successful effort to secure a future of peace, prosperity and true democracy for the people of Bangladesh.

The regular column 'Along My Way' by S B Chaudhuri will be published tomorrow

COMCEC 1994

New Plan of Action to Further Economic Relations

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

THE two-day meeting of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), which concluded its deliberations in Istanbul recently, unanimously adopted a New Plan of Action for furthering of economic relations within the Ummah. This was the Tenth Anniversary of COMCEC and nearly 200 delegates, who assembled at the Marmara hotel of Taksim square, which is in the heart of Istanbul, expressed the hope that the New Plan of Action would provide the much needed impetus to achieve the goals of economic development that the 51-nation OIC had set before itself.

Ten years ago COMCEC held its first meeting in Istanbul when Gen Kenan Evren was President and late Turgut Ozal was Prime Minister. In 1984 OIC held its summit in Casablanca and decided to entrust Turkey with holding annual conferences of Economic and Commercial Cooperation. I organised the first meeting as the Assistant Secretary General, in charge of Economic and Administrative Affairs then, and worked closely with Turkish authorities.

According to well established tradition, these annual meetings are presided over by the President of Turkey and this year President Suleyman Demirel inaugurated it. The meeting attracts high level delegations led by ministers in

charge of Economic Affairs and this year was no exception. Bangladesh delegation was led by her Ambassador in Ankara, Mahmud Hassan.

The most important event of the Tenth Anniversary meeting was the adoption of the New Plan of Action. Prior to the COMCEC meeting an important meeting was held in Istanbul between the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Turkish Federation of Chamber of Commerce. This is the first time that these two bodies met and they pronounced strongly in favour of strengthening the private sector. Indeed all delegations present at the COMCEC meeting heavily underlined the role of private sector in developing economies. Another recurring theme was integration with world economy in the light of signature of GATT this year at Marrakesh in Morocco.

Tenth COMCEC was held in the backdrop of momentous developments in the Middle East and President Demirel devoted a large part of his speech to these political developments.

On the role played by COMCEC, Turkish President informed the gathering that a 'New Plan of Action for Economic Cooperation would open new horizons and add

'Export Credit Insurance and Investment Guarantee Scheme, Industrial Cooperation, Food Security and Agricultural Development, Transport, Communications, Energy, Technical Cooperation and Infrastructure and Public Works. The second resolution urged member states to assist Palestine, Lebanon, Albania, Uganda, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The closing session was

presided by Parliament President Husamettin Cindoruk, in his capacity as Acting President. President Demirel had flown to Ashkabad, capital of Turkmenistan, after inaugurating COMCEC. He attended the independence celebrations of this newly independent state along with Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Turkmenistan

President Saparmurat Turkmenbasin attended a six-nation Turkic summit in Istanbul, in the third week of October. This was President Demirel's third visit to Turkmenistan in three years. This large sparsely populated country in the heart of Central Asia has rich deposits of natural gas. Negotiations for transportation of natural gas through pipeline via Iran and Turkey to Europe is in an advanced stage. The project is expected to cost more than US\$3 billion.

In a conversation with me, OIC Secretary-General Hamid Al-Gabid said that the next OIC summit will be held in Morocco on 16-18 December. On the Middle East, Al-Gabid pointed out that a difficult situation had been created by 'escalation of violence specially by Hamas' and expressed the hope that 'Jordan and Palestine coordinate better their approach towards Israel'. On Bosnia-Herzegovina, the

Secretary General stated, 'We accepted Action Plan of five members of Security Council, although we consider it unjust. It is for those members to implement them or lift embargo against Muslims of Bosnia'. He pointed out that US appeared to be getting ready to 'act unilaterally, although there were signals that Britain, France and Russia, who oppose lifting of embargo, might pull out Muslim troops and said, 'I have promise for many more should some European powers withdraw theirs'.

I asked how did he assess his five years of stewardship of OIC. Hamid Al-Gabid said that the membership had now gone up to 51 and Kazakhstan attended the meetings as observer and I hope to see Uzbekistan soon'. OIC continues to play an active role in many issues of current interest and particularly those concerning the Ummah he concluded.

OPINION

Prevarication : Fruit of Independence or Democracy ?

M H Siddiqui, BU

An article under the title 'A Tale of Two Plans: FAP and NEMAP' appeared in The Daily Star of October 25, 1994 where the Flood Action Plan (FAP) has been briefly discussed with inadequate information. It is, therefore, essential that records be put straight and right. Hence this small note albeit the fact that factual statement can hardly create a stir that wrong information can.

It has been said that each of the donors prepared concerned Terms of Reference (ToR) using their expatriate consultants. No, Each ToR, without exception, was prepared jointly by Flood Plan Coordination (FPCO) and donor's representative to be finally approved by a Technical Committee headed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Water Resources.

It has been alleged that the component studies were started at different times and the desired interaction among studies could not occur. Specifically, regional studies did not follow Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as it was developed at a later date. In fact, many of the studies were launched concurrently while some later but the interaction among the study teams was excellent and unique never known before.

About the EIA Guidelines, only one regional study (FAP-2) was completed earlier and the acceptance was deferred until the study carried out a thorough EIA following the Guidelines and produced a new report. It may be worth to mention that every regional study was mandated to carry out EIA, independent of the Environmental study (FAP-16), as it was foreseen that results of FAP-16 might not be available before completion of a regional plan.

The more one country possesses gold the more it is rich and prosperous. If Iraq, despite all sorts of economic sanctions, survives today it is only due to her gold reserve.

We feel that our government may issue gold coins of Taka 1000/-, 2000/-, 5000/-, 10000/- and 25000/- denominations through Bangladesh Bank and some other public sector banks for a period of three years only before which cannot be encashed for the completion of the period. This would create saving habits among our people.

Similarly, the delay in obtaining results of Institution Development Study (FAP-26) has been shown as a lapse to decide upon the modality of FAP implementation. This is blowing both hot and cold in the same breath. While asking for study phase to be over first, urgency for modalities of implementation is being expressed at the same time. FAP no more looks after floods alone, it is concerned with

people's participation and EIA has been cited as a response to critics. This is contrary to facts. The Eleven Guiding Principles enunciated by the government contain the concept of controlled flooding and drainage, and effective popular participation in explicit terms, as the cornerstone in FAP studies. These were in-built in the programme at the very inception and long before the critics surfaced.

Indeed, people's participation and EIA are complex issues and FAP can proudly and rightly so, claim the pioneer's role in putting them into practice.

After 1988 floods almost everyone had some prescriptions to make right or wrong, in black and white. This was unknown in 1960s or 1970s. Should this be attributed to our independence (since 1971) or the democracy (since 1991) that we are enjoying?

To the Editor...

The dialogue

Sir, The Commonwealth mediated Government-Opposition dialogue has collapsed. The present deadlock arising out of the stubborn stand of the main political parties has betrayed their propensity, if any, for doing public welfare.

This deadlock, as it appears from the present scenario, will never ease unless they relinquish their intransigence and shake hands with honest gesture. If not harts, marches, blockade and destruction are more likely to continue.

The political parties, if they have any serious intention to do good to people, have to reach a consensus on caretaker government issue now. Any further delay may prove too costly.

Hence, the only option left before them, if not otherwise, is either to accept the modalities, may be like the one formulated by the former information minister, or put the proposition to plebiscite.

I urge upon the Government and the Opposition not to upset the apple-cart.

M Sikandar Rana
Dept of English
Jahangirnagar University

also endorse the speakers' views and, wish, very earnestly, that this chapter is brought to an end.

Dr Quazi Anuara Monsur
House 58, Road 15A (New)
Dharmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209

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Sir, I would congratulate the FBCCI president Salman F Rahman for urging both the government and the opposition political parties to resolve the current political crisis for the sake of the country's economy. It is essential in view of the present appalling condition of a poor country like Bangladesh. Already in the social scene we face a bleak situation. We are suffering from lack of social security and moral degradation overridden by anti-social activists. Having lost safety and tranquillity in the social and economic field we naturally look to the remaining area of stability, that is the political arena. It is regrettable that the two leaders could not solve their problems at home and had to accept interference from outside! But even with the good services of Mr Ninian, over one long month the 'dialogues' could not be brought to an amicable settlement! As a peace-loving citizen, I do wish to put an humble suggestion to the two leaders. Let Begum Khaleda Zia continue for the rest of her 'term' minus the pre-election period. That period will be in the hand of a neutral, judicial chief who will conduct the affairs and hand over power to the elected government. I think, a caretaker government is the only solution at the moment in order to avert further damage to the country. We fought for democracy and let us take recourse to a democratic way of the political affairs. Begum Khaleda Zia will, in the meantime, have ample time to do good to the people and win their confidence. This will ensure her a glorious return.

Any way we want a solution. But if each party stubborn at its respective stand it will never be possible. The people of Bangladesh love peace. If both the parties think that their proposals are for the people's betterment, they must act so to convince the people that it is not for going to power, and thus reach a favourable conclusion.

Some good advice was aired through the TV on Nov 12. I observe that