Dhaka, Saturday, December 31, 1994

There is Time Yet

The Opposition wanted a unilateral declaration from the Prime Minister to the effect that she and her cabinet would resign 30 days before the election. In exchange they would have desisted from resigning, and would sit with the ruling party to fix up other issues like the form of government, that would supervise the running of the administration during the 30 days gap. The announcement has come, but not in time to save the negotiations. Chief Whip of the Opposition Md Nasim said so in a speech yesterday.

Well now that the biggest impediment, according to the Opposition, has been removed namely the role and the position of Begum Zia before and during elections - can we not pick up the pieces from where it was left off on the 28th? Can we go back in time? What about creating a condition that brings back the possibility of finishing the work that was almost completed but for some minor points? We pose the question with the seriousness that it 'deserves; what prevents us going back to the evening of the 28th and discussing the agreement that almost came about, now that the PM has conceded? Only one thing. The fact that resignations have already been submitted. Well, here we would like to remind the Opposition of something they have repeated numerous times. "Constitution, and rules are for the people. People are not for either." Well if the Opposition really believes that, then nothing should prevent us from going back in time, and reaching a conclusion which is desired by all If we weigh this move against the possibility of the bloodshed, chaos and political unrest, then, most certainly, we should revive the negotiations immediately.

Opposition politicians may say that to negotiate now would make them look foolish. The ruling party may say it finds such a prospect insulting. We say, it is better to look foolish, and face insult, for the good of the people and the country, than letting chaos prevail. Given sincerity, goodwill and a genuine appreciation of the harm that the present crisis is doing to the country, we see the possibility of a window of opportunity. Can we expect our politicians to put the country's interest above their own?

We would also like to suggest that all civic, professional, cultural and other bodies and groups could think of organising a "Concerned Citizen's Rally" urging, and, if necessary, forcing through public opinion, both sides to finalise the agreement that they have already arrived at.

The Maestro

On Thursday passed the 80th birth anniversary of one his compatriots lovingly call as Zainul. That was how he signed his paintings. Were his parents aware that they were naming their son after the most illustrious Sultan of the Kashmiris

- a fair and far-seeing monarch living for the good of his subjects and anticipating Akbar the Great in all manners?

In the Kishoregani backwoods that was unlikely and the name perhaps was taken from Mir Mosharraf's epic Bishad Sindhu. And there was no knowing for them either that an immortal of the Bengalee culture was inexorably shaping among them amidst a very uncongenial human situation. For the son of a Muslim family in the Sharia-fearing villages to go for painting amounted not only to rebellion but also to heresy. Fortunately for us all, nature was very generous there bathing young Zainul's soul with many splendoured light and a myriad views that he itched to transform into pictures. Zainul Abedin never grew past his bucolic Brahmaputra ambiance and there lay the source of all that is beautiful and strong and eternal in his pictures.

Look at his lines — so strong and so bold, so much matching the strength of his never-diminishing humanism. It is this - the line and the humanism and his rural mooring - that kept him rooted to whatever gave his works significance.

A water-colourist of the first order, his works bore the unmistakeable stamp of his unusual eye for colour. Oil came rather late in life but here too Zainul was Zainul with both colour and form coming from traditional life and the hues of the villages. Did Zainul's overwhelming love of and commitment to life, as tellingly coming out in his famine sketches, help his painterly quest all the way? There is room for doubt there. Perhaps he was cut just short of being among the greatest in the subcontinent by just that good thing - aclivism born of humanist persuasion.

But that streak in him helped lay the foundation of an undying art movement in our country. All who wield a brush and all who tarry before a painting - owe it immeasurably to Zainul who transformed the society largely from an anti-art position to a pro-art one. He created the most enduring institution of all in our nation. We remember him in all gratitude.

The Gentleman

PBH May. Peter to his teammates, died on Tuesday rather prematurely at the age of 64. The best of cricketing opinion do agree with Richie Benaud and Roy Illingworth when they say that May was the best batsman England has produced over the last five decades. Peter retired from competitive cricket rather early in the day and as such the picture of a handsome and lanky young man is what has been left of him in our memories. And it is hard to take that such a picture of youth should be no more.

And he was a picture of decency too. Stubborn decency it was. Always accommodating but never giving in — as the skipper of England in 41 tests. In the post-Bradman era runs hit a slump with great bowlers burning bright. May piled up a stylish 4537 in 66 tests, most times acting as a captain.

The history of cricket started with a divide sharp and clear - the gentlemen and the players. That persisted for well over a century. And this took a pernicious toll of our home cricket of the subcontinent too — with the incomparable C K Nayudu struggling hard for an honourable place in the team lorded over by maharajas and gaekwads and maharajkumars. May died possibly as the last gentleman of cricket — a true one and not only by lineage. He never took money out of his sport.

We would ever prize May's gentle yet strict ways in the field as well as in life.

Tale of a Deep Tube-well: Not for Water Alone by Abdul Bayes

to poverty alleviation in for increased adoption of social development inputs, the organisers attempted to plug them with irrigation. Bangladesh, so far only onethird of the cultivable land sult. As far as cropping pattern could be brought under modis concerned, villagers of ern technology net and also Chandun so long banked on only one-fourth of land is re-Aus-Amon-non-cereal winter ported to be covered by modcrops - a cropping pattern ern high yielding varieties. much in evidence in non-irri-There are many areas where gated condition in Bangladesh. this facility is still a mere Not by Water Alone! dream and where millions of farm households tend to re-

LTHOUGH irrigation is

the key to increased

A agricultural growth and

main outside the orbit of irri-

gation-led growth. A small vil-

lage, called Chandun, with

about three-fourths of small

and marginal farm households

is one of those deprived ones

and hence clinged to the age

old agricultural practices and

cropping patterns. A vicious

circle of poverty appeared a

fait accompli in the wake of

agricultural low income-low

surplus and low investment

Kapasia Thana of the Gazipur

district and more importantly,

in the vicinity of the famous

agricultural and rice research

institutes such as BIRRI and

BARI. Villagers told us that at-

tempts were made in the past

to get a Deep Tube-well (DTW)

from BADC but the topography

of the village allegedly foiled

the attempt to sink DTW

there. On the other hand, pri-

vate initiatives recoiled in the

face of such adverse engineer-

ing report. Nature, thus, re-

mained to be the only source

of watering crops in the rainy

season and the much publi-

cized and productive HYVs -

the winter crops - could

hardly be grown there as a re-

The village stands under

scenario.

The woes of the Chandun farmers, however, appeared to be over. Since 1992. Chandun village was hooked on to modern technology of agricultural production led by irrigation. An NGO called Palli-Mongal procured a DTW for the villagers with seed money provided by the linkage partners, Morgan State University and Centre for Human Resources Development, Jahangirnagar University. Managed by a committee of the villagers, the farmers already reaped two boro harvests from the said

The scheme is unlike other schemes in Bangladesh. The fundamental point of departure lies in its objective of not selling water alone! The said NGO already has other socioeconomic and demographic interventions in the village. Viewing increased farm level income as a sine qua non for increased adoption of social development inputs (e.g. adoption of family planning methods and/or sending children to schools), the organizers attempted to plug these with income raising sources like irrigation. Thus, irrigation

increased agricultural income but, at the same time, the DTW management committee wanted to see that the users of water are motivated towards small family size and large litefacy rate. The nobility of such model should be well built in a regime of inelastic demand, for irrigation water.

The scheme is unlike other schemes in Bangladesh... Viewing increased farm level income as a sine qua non

Economics of Water

The economic impacts of that DTW on households in Chandun is quite understandable and probably not far from those evidenced in other places in Bangladesh. For example, substantial shift in cropping pattern with heavy reliance on irrigated boro crop is being reported to have taken place. A small or marginal farmer now gets about 50 maunds of paddy per acre as compared to 15-20 maunds fetched earlier with traditional crops. Demand for labour increased pari passu the modern labour intensive HYVs and most of the increased labour is reported to hail from small, marginal and landless households. Use of chemical fertilizer, once almost unknown, became the chief input for incréased production and hence a small fertilizer market was developed. Chemical fertilizer is now available as and when needed. The net return of irrigated farm households (imputing costs of family labour) is reported to be 1.5 times of the non-irrigated agricultural households. 'Farmers'

perception on changes in economic condition attributable to the advent of the DTW, as could be gleaned from discussions, seem positive. According to them, the DTW showed that their plots of land are in fact more productive than they actually thought of. Households consumption of rice is reported to have gone up (possibly with higher income elasticity of demand for rice at low level of income), many farmers turned into surplus from a deficit position. The secondary impacts are no less important. The villagers told us that the demand for non farm labour intensive goods tends to rise with increased income, and the wage rate has become relatively more com-

Limitations However, as elsewhere in Bangladesh, four major problems seem to have plagued agriculture in the village. First, mono cropping system appears to have replaced a multi-cropping system and the production of minor non-cereal crops are almost on a wane. This is likely to affect the food balance of households adversely. Second, agricultural extension network does not appear to work well in the area with farmers still unaware of the optimal usage of agricultural inputs. Third, "free rider" problem seems to exist with increased internal tensions among users and fourth, the

capacity utilization of the DTW is only half of the potential limit and allegedly, poor mechanism of water distribution could be adduced to that poor capacity utilization.

Social Dimensions

Traditional evaluation of DTWs in Bangladesh mostly concentrated on the variation of economic parameters "with" and "without" a situation of irrigation facilities. Since the Chandun project embraces social dimensions, the pertinent question is: to what extent the social development parameters could be changed through such mechanism? From a "quick" and "dirty" survey, it could be discerned that mobilization of villagers around the DTW, for the moment, shelved the village feud between influential "barts". The water "crisis" perhaps brought them together under the Palli-Mongal umbrella. Second, one-third of the respondents did agree that the utility of small families and enhanced literacy is now more appealing to them and that is due to the campaign by the DTW management. Third, the relatively lower water price in their project, as compared to the adjacent private scheme. lures them to a collective management efforts. Fourth, the Family Planning acceptance rate is now 70 per cent as compared to the base line scenario of 30 per cent. A part of that incremental acceptance is adduced to the motivation introduced by DTW management group. Fifth, it could be gathered that the proportion of eligible children going to school is higher in Chandun village than in adjacent villages where the NGO has similar social intervention programmes but does not have those programmes tagged with sale of

The above mentioned findings might appear straight jacket and flawed with methodological errors. Perhaps it is. But the most important lesson to be derived from such experience is the fact that at micro level, human development index could be positively varied by increased income of the recipients. People are believed to want more children for safety reasons on one hand and are forced to keep children out of school for poverty reasons, on the other. The provisions for such income earning opportunities should form the main agenda in discussions relating to human resources development. The cardinal achievement of Chandun scheme in raising the index should not be that important as the ordinal nature of the programme i.e. an awareness about the disutility of big families and the utility of sending children to schools. And that awareness building largely hinges not only on income per se but on an assured or sustainable level of income for years to come

The writer is a Professor of Economics and Dean of Social Sciences, Jahangirnagar Uni-

ing the illegals who come in on

HROUGHOUT the 12th Asian Games in Hiroshima, Japanese officials were busy keeping score not just of the number of medals being won, but also of athletes who were dropping out of sight and into the country's labour underground.

Despite their zealous tabkeeping. Japanese police said 15 athletes from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Iran and Bangladesh had gone missing by the end of the two-week Games in mid-October.

Fifty-five Filipinos had tried to slip into Japan by posing as volleyball players even before the Asiad began, but were stopped by immigration officials at the Fukuoka airport. The fake athletes wore Philippine uniforms and ID tags, and had paid almost US\$2.000 each to a coach' who promised to bring them to Japan, where they could then look for work.

Japan's labour market remains officially closed to foreigners, but a labour shortage and ageing population combine to make it a magnet for migrant workers from Asia's poorer economies. Indeed, the Asian worker's road to overseas labour has led to Japan since the mid-1980s, when demand for foreign workers in the Gulf dropped. But today, prosperity has spread to other Asian countries, which are now also attracting waves of often-illegal migrants from within the re-

Growing economic integration means the supply of labour tends to go where the demand is, and that is in Asia's strong performers. In many a booming Asian economies, industries have expanded so swiftly that skilled labour has become scarce and wages have risen Often, too, illegal workers take blue-collar work shunned by

the locals. South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore have reached nearly full employment, facing labour shortages that draw foreigners to small and medium-scale firms. Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei are also destinations for overseas labour.

Some four million Asians now work in countries within the region. A good proportion of them came on tourist visas.

forged papers or are overstaying work permits and are thus at greater risk of being shortchanged or subjected to physical and sexual abuse.

water was made available for

Malaysia has at least one million foreign workers, the demand fueled by an average eight percent growth that has caused acute shortages in fields like construction and electronics. Officials have expressed concern about the security implications of having foreigners constitute more than 10 percent of its labour force.

Even Thailand, still a labour exporter itself, is cracking down on 300,000 illegal immigrants. Workers have been coming in from Indochina as well as Bangladesh, India, Burma and Nepal. Thai officials arrested thousands of illegals in a sweep earlier this year.

"Wherever employment opportunities are, that is where people will go." says Nelia Sancho of the Asian Women Human Rights Council. In such cases, she says, warnings about the dangers of working illegally hardly stop people from going where they believe they have a chance.

"I don't know what it is that makes people risk everything. even if they know very well the risks of working abroad illegally," says Susan Castrence, spokeswoman of the Philippine oreign office.

The Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Thailand, are major labour exporters to East Asia. Many of their skilled people help fill richer Asian nations' demand for engineers, technicians and managers. Others toil as domestic helpers or construction workers.

At least two million Filipinos are working abroad, unable to find suitable jobs or salaries at home. Overseas employment was encouraged by the government as a temporary measure in the 1970s, but the exodus continues to this day.

Sancho says Asia appears to be Filipinos' preferred destination for overseas jobs if they had a choice. She notes, "They will go where they are accepted. But between the Middle East and East Asia they prefer the latter, because the Middle East has a reputation for a place where sexual molestation and violence takes place." In search

For Jobs, Go East

Intra-Asian migration becomes more complex as a growing number of workers from impoverished countries try anything to get to rich Asian nations in search of jobs. Johanna Son of Inter Press Service reports from Manila



of jobs, illegal migrants are also thinking up elaborate ruses to get past stringent entry requirements. Nine Filipinos who were eyeing jobs in Japan got accreditation as media covering Philippine President Fidel Ramos's visit to Japan in March 1993, then promptly disappeared upon arrival in Tokyo.

More attention is being given to international and intra-Asian labour migration, especially because foreign workers lack protection in many host countries.

Labour experts note that the rate of ratification of International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions on human is notoriously low in Asian countries - about eight percent of a total of 5.642 ratifications.

According to ILO regional adviser on industrial relations Carmelo Noriel, implementation of existing labour laws in South and South-east Asia is also a "major problem and issue. In many cases, the lack of enforcement or the violations of labour laws are very serious and prevalent".

The vulnerability of illegal workers to labour abuse is compounded by the fact that

they are also often social outcasts as well. .

in an August report, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) said: "The negative side of migration pertains to the extreme vulnerability and lack of social protection for migrant workers. The growth of clandestine migration and female labour migration has created special problems for worker protection.

"Where international migration takes place, it should do so in a regular and supervised manner, not in irregular conditions which involve considerable hardship and exploitation for the individuals concerned," it added.

But international action especially to address undocumented migration and employment, has yet to catch up with the extent of intra-regional mi-

In October, the Philippines reiterated the need for countries to ratify the international convention for migrant workers, telling the UN General Assembly that many host countries, developing nations included, treat

migrants "as less than the human beings they are".

Some countries, finding it hard to seal labour accords with labour-receiving ones, are taking unilateral action to check on workers' conditions.

A diplomatic row threatened to mar Philippine-Japan ties in September after the Philippine labour attache reported inspecting 100 Japanese bars and nightclubs and finding many cases of breached contracts and women forced to work as strippers or prostitutes. The probes were done without the knowledge of Japanese police.

Nearly 80,000 Filipino women enter Japan with entertainer visas each year, excludtourist visas. Jorge Tigno of the Manila-

based Institute of Strategic and Development Studies suggested early this year that Asian countries work for a "regional labour compact" that would protect foreign migrants and preserve economic benefits reaped by the booming region.

But without stronger protection or healthier economic conditions at home, desperate workers are not about to abandon their hopes. One of the 55 Filipinos who posed as an Asian Games athlete assured: "We were not able to make it this time, but we'll try again some other time.

OPINION

You are Mistaken Mr Editor

This refers to your signed commentary - An appeal to our leaders - published in your daily on 27 December. In fact, through your commentary Mr Editor, you ventilated the feelings of 112 million peace-loving people of this country. You appealed to the good-self of both the leaders keeping in view the hopes and aspirations of a poor country like Langladesh which desperately needs democracy, stability. peace, and above all development.

You rightly fried to indicate to both the leaders how a particular country, without any fault of the common people of its own, can run into deep crisis due to the failures of their leaders. Perhaps you had in mind the untold sufferings and incredible horrors of the people of Somalia, Rwanda and some other civil-strife-ridden countries of the world.

Perhaps you wanted to remind the two leaders about the recent developments in South Africa which was under apartheid - the worst crime against civilization - for long hundreds of years. Perhaps you wanted to remind them of way of Nelson Mandela, who after his landslide victory in recent elections, made compromise with the white minority leader who enjoys the supports of only 13 per cent of the total population.

But alas! none of your commentaries so far could exert any impact on any of our leaders. The commentary addressed to the present Information Minister immediately after he assumed office also failed to produce any impact. Radio and Television remained the same "boxes" as they were during the time of the fallen President. Just look at the instance of Wednesday's (28/12) incident. With endless concern and anxiety people of the country were unable to learn anything from Radio and BTV about the grave national crisis which affects them directly. Do you still think, Mr Editor, the Information Minister could read the message of your commentary?

Finally, it seems that your search for a real mother in Bangladesh is not based on facts. You cited the example of Caliph Omar where there was a real mother and Caliph could identify her. Had there been two false mothers how could be do that? In Bangladesh, in your search for a real mother between the two, perhaps you are mistaken in assuming that there is one.

Ali Reza Bakhtier North Road, Dhaka

Wake UP, citizens

Sir, Belated congratulations for the wonderful commentary "Competition of irresponsible statements" on 01.12.94. Your views amply justifies the need of the hour, which, in fact, are the views of the millions who are merely used as scapegoats by the politicians to serve their interests!

I only wish the two ladies, who claim to be our leaders, learn from the messages carried in your newspaper on positive and pro-people politics ever since its inception.

The time has come for us. the silent majority, to make it clear to the politicians that we do not endorse the views of the Opposition programmes and the hard-headedness of the government. We want a better Bangladesh to live in and must sacrifice our petty self interests for the national well being. Wake up, my brothers and

sisters of Bangladesh, before it is too late. They have the muscles but we have the numbers. And it is for us to make the politicians and their workers aware that we, the citizens, are the main force.

We are fed-up with the

meaningless chaos created by the government and the opposition. Have we not elected them to serve us and this

country?

We believed after the last election that things would take a positive turn. But what have we got all these years except hartals, boycotts, agitations, etc. And, what has the government done to settle the issues amicably? To lead the country. one needs a broader perspective or vision and an unbiased mentality. How can you justify, and

this question is to Khaleda Zia. changing the name of Ershad Square to Jatiya Square and Chandrima Udyan to Zia Udyan? How can you show on TV on 26th March an irrelevant documentary on Ziaur Rahman without showing anything on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other authentic documentaries? This is indeed the height of hypocrisy. And you too, Sheikh Hasina,

what is it that you are up to? You really believe the people are with you when you call hartals, barricades, etc? You are grossly mistaken! Please do not bother to thank us after each hartal for we, the people, do not approve of it. Come up

with positive programme and you will earn the people's re-

I must clarify here that I do not belong to any political party, and God forbid, I do not intend to. I am sure my grievances will be echoed by millions of others. Let us wake up from the slumber and build a better Bangladesh. 'Kumbha'

Dhaka.

Will This Shame Awaken Us'

Sir, thanks for the editorial Will This Shame Awaken Us' on December 19, 1994. According to Unicef the condition to the children of our country is really alarming. If this dangerous situation cannot awaken our government, our children will remain far behind in comparison to other country's children.

Children are the heart of a nation. But it's really regretful that in our country ninety per cent of them are under weight and stunted before the age of two due to malnutrition. Iodine deficiency is another factor which hampers the mental and physical growth of a growing

As a citizen of an independent country children must be provided with all the basic needs from the government. Will they ever get enough attention from the government?

Emdadur Rahman Department of English Chittagong University.

'An Open Letter to the Pope'

Sir, Quite a number of reviews has been written on Ms Shamel's book titled -. "An Open Letter to the Pope" by prominent scholars of the country which was published in different national and international newspapers and periodicals. Among those who have so far reviewed the book are: Dr M Shamsher Ali, Vice Chancellor Bangladesh Open University. Dr M Mustafizur Rahman, Mr Shihab Zoheb.

Dr Shamsher Ali in the opening paragraph of his review wrote: "I must say that this is a book with a difference and should be read by people of all faiths the author has aptly quoted from the Quranic verses and from Maurice Bucaille's book The Bible, the Quran and Science to show that the Quran contains all the elements of science, economics and sociology necessary for conducting a meaningful life on this planet. There is hardly a topic of life that has not been covered in the Quran.

The Minister for Religious

Affairs, Government of Bangladesh Muhammad Keramat Ali in a letter of appreciation to Begum Shamael stated: "the title of the book has drawn my attention first. Yester evening after receiving the book, started reading it. I even read it during the Parliament session. This type of book is timely. I am confident that this book will be very warmly accepted by the people keen to learn about Islam, and readers will also be benefitted". (translated by this writer from the Minister's Bangla

This writer had also the opportunity to go through the same book. The book is indeed an important research work on Islamic philosophy and this book deserves wide circulation among the non-Muslims through the Bangladeshis living abroad.

letter).

The book has been published by Ms Rumana Hag and printed by the Islamic Foundation Press, Dhaka

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor BAI, Dhaka.

Hajj and Ijtema Sir, With great attention. I

have gone through the letter -"BTV. Radio and Biswa ljtema" written by M Nazmul Haque from Dhaka which was published in your esteemed daily on 12th December 1994. Now I would take the liberty to make some comments on his letter. I have practical experience about the congregation based on Tablig Jamaat at Tongi. My sense of life and religion can never permit me to accept that it is in any way comparable to 'Hajj' congregation. My objection may create some confusions against his earnest request to the authorities concerned. But my question is that how one can compare the litema with 'Hajj' which is ordained by the Holy Quran?

Ali Asgar Chawdhuri Dhaka.