

For a Fresh Mandate

The Prime Minister, in a speech at Bholahat, Nawabganj, delivered on Sunday, declared that her party and her government were ready to follow either of the two Constitutional options — fresh general election or by-elections. This was for the first time that Begum Zia has clearly stated she was willing and also ready to go for fresh general election, if needed.

We feel that the Prime Minister should not go for the by-election option at all. It is a non-starter. The opposition has expressed categorically that it is against it. The move is also quite impractical. Why put the country through such a huge expense for electing 147 new members of Parliament whose term will hardly be a few months? It makes absolutely no sense. So as far as we can see, there is only one option, that is to go for fresh elections. With the willingness of the BNP, as articulated by Begum Zia at Bholahat, there should now be no second guessing about what to do next.

The resignation of 147 MPs, has not made the Parliament illegal as Sheikh Hasina claims, but has definitely made it non-functional in its true sense. Legally it can carry on its listless existence, but morally and ethically its term ended the day negotiations failed, and the opposition felt obliged to submit its en masse resignation. We had hoped that the time provided by the Speaker, by delaying his decision on the status of the resignations, would produce some last moment rethinking, and both sides would see the logic of a negotiated settlement. What started as a well-intentioned move by the Speaker became highly questionable, as he took too much time in giving his decision, thereby allowing himself to become entangled in a ruling by the High Court. Now it has become too late for anything other than an opinion that finds the resignations, however flawed, acceptable.

We know that there is a certain logic of pushing back things so that the current Parliament can fulfil its five-year term. We would have all liked that. But since we have not been so fortunate, we should not try to push things till then just for the sake of that one consideration. We strongly feel that both sides should now agree for a fresh general election, the overall framework for holding which has more or less been agreed upon. Whatever remains should be addressed in a fortnight manner, and settled with the prime objective of holding a free and fair election.

A Good Beginning

The International Trade Fair came to an end yesterday after a run of 23 days. Many people expecting the fair to be extended by at least a week — that would have completed the month — were disappointed by the scheduled closure.

By international standards this was a small show — almost puny. But then you must make a beginning and a small beginning is a better thing than one big but fraught with risks. Our industrial output is not enviable and our domestic market for quality international manufactures is still on the poor side. A bigger fair would as such be a step not only into uncertainty but also into fairly sure futility.

A big crowd — three million — went to the fair and brisk was the business for local stalls. Every winter, there is some such fair for people to go roaming, window-shopping and even buying things. This is a habit developed over decades and may be centuries. This year with no sign of any other fair, people were delighted to have this answer one of their wintry needs — a need for leisure and recreation. The officials may try to justify the government exertions by figures of local firms landing foreign contracts. But there is no need to do that — the statistics of the visitors does that capably.

Having said this we, however, hurry to confirm our faith in the nation's industrial initiative as so convincingly manifested by the buoyant stocks market. In perhaps three to five years' time this toy thing is sure to graduate into one of the more lucrative, and as such attractive, small international fairs, if the government keeps at it, that is. But before that happens, our people's buying power will have to be boosted a little.

Long Hand of Terrorism

In the Golpaha area of Chittagong city, a JCD leader was shot dead at dusk on Saturday. And earlier on the day in Fatikchhari a Chhatra League leader and a doctor was killed by gun fire. All the murders were by 'unknown' assailants'. Experience says the culprits were not quite unknown. Then who is protecting whom and why? In the cases of campus murders where the identities of culprits are clearer, the same game of protection is prospering. How and why? Police is being very methodically made to feign ignorance. It cannot be that they do not know. A demoted idea of politics on the part of powers superior is preventing police not only from going after the killers but also from prosecuting them — making a farce of law and justice and pushing the society fast into the rule of jungle law.

Can it be that the Jagannath Hall students do not know about who killed Joydeep Datta Choudhury? Or the BCL top brass or police? They all know. But it is very unlikely that the killers would be nabbed and prosecuted. In the strange world of campus terrorism where even court convictions and tough sentences come finally to almost nothing, this may not be surprising. But the institutions of the state and moral and other fabrics of society are irreparably harmed by this.

Stranger things happen in campus terrorism. Even after a notorious killer has finally been held and put on the dock, if the ruling power chooses not to see him punished, police move in a way that he is freed and is available to serve his benefactors. All this is to woo the campus killers to this side or that, why? Any political party worth its name has a private army, specially among the students. And they need branded criminals for these — as these goons would understandably be more pliant.

Do we want an end to campus terrorism? Who is this we? Surely not the ones who are contributing mightily to its perpetuation. Campus killing is already travelling abroad. Government should take note and act before, it is too late.

A wayside vegetable market assembles daily at a place which, conveniently for me, falls on the route I usually take during morning walks. Farmers living in villages on the outskirts of the city, I guess, bring their produce to this open-air, makeshift marketplace to sell. Any way, it is a place to get vegetables coming straight from farms — all fresh and green.

One day, I came across a farmer offering for sale a small stock of green vegetables which looked like knobby, dwarf cucumbers. It was something different and a few people were curious to learn more about the vegetable. 'It's a sort of cucumber,' explained the farmer. 'Eta ekid nuton jush.' amplified the farmer — 'It's a new product.'

Actually the vegetable the farmer offered to the buyers was gherkin, rather uncommon in these parts. The farmer was right of course in identifying it as a kind of cucumber. Gherkin really is one of some 30 related species of cucumber, a creeping plant of gourd family, considered to be a native of north-western India. Gherkin derives its name from the Dutch word *gurkkin*, enough of a reason to render this native of the subcontinent all the more unfamiliar to us.

Gherkin is used widely for pickling in many countries, especially in the West. We have no use for it. We don't really have a name for it. For us, it's a new product alright. All the same, the news media had reported quite a while back that an enterprising agricultural marketing firm in the private sector organised commercial

A new product need not necessarily be a novelty, something which was not seen or heard of before. Diversification of use of an existing product — finding new applications — renovation, adaptation, drawing derivatives from a known source material — even devising ways to exploit an untapped resource — all such undertakings could yield new products

growing of gherkin and was actually exporting the item. The idea then, is to develop new products. We may not use it, but others would. Thus, a new product can bring benefits even if you do not utilize it yourself. You could sell it outright or franchise it, lease it out — earning an income. Albeit, a new product which the sponsors can use themselves would be prized all the more.

A new product need not necessarily be a novelty, something which was not seen or heard of before. Diversification of use of an existing product — finding new applications — renovation, adaptation, drawing derivatives from a known source material — even devising ways to exploit an untapped resource — all such undertakings could yield new products. All the same, new products don't come that easy. You also need inventive minds to come up with new ideas and work on them. And the inventor requires institutional support, financial backing and technological infrastructure.

Advanced economies lay out huge funds on research and development or R&D, as they call it. The idea is to develop new products, to devise improved uses for existing ones, to attain technological superiority. Governments themselves fund R&D projects. They also encourage the private sector to spend on R&D by providing tax breaks and other forms of incentives to stimulate search for new products. Multination-

als set apart big chunks of their earnings for R&D.

Our stated priorities are understandably different. The urgency of the need to get over the poverty trap superimposed on our thoughts. The immediate concern is to grow more food to feed the teeming millions, reduce protein deficiency in the diet, raise health and sanitation standards, educate the people build shelters for them. The limited amounts that we spend on R&D go to

couple of years or so, there was one about making household furniture from the fibre of water hyacinth. Then there was the report of edible oil being extracted from radish seeds. However, such happenings are few and far between. The efforts don't seem to catch on.

Given the rather uninspiring record of R&D in this country, it's no surprise that green jute, the newest product, is putting up a stellar per-

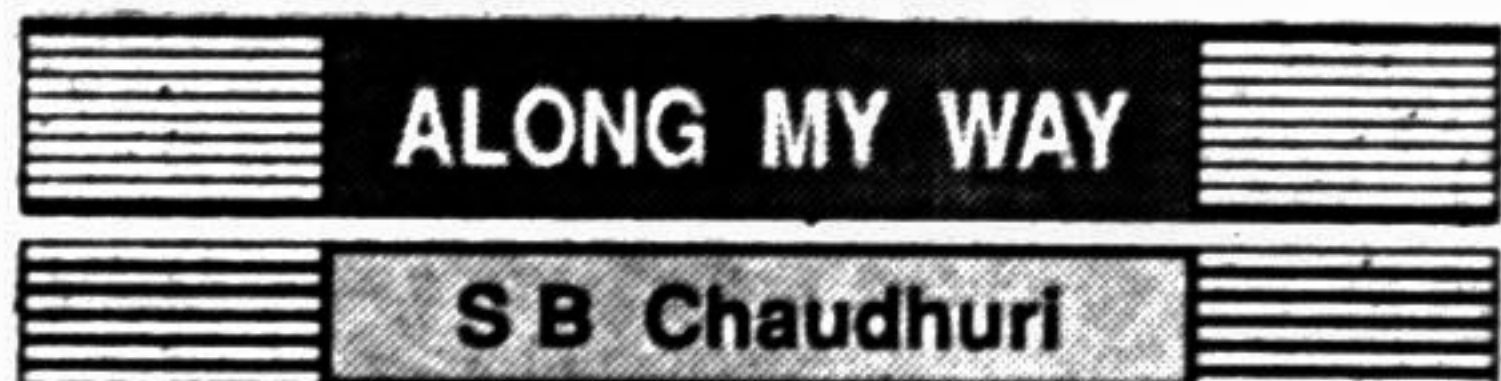
formance these days. Finding new applications of jute through chemical conversion of the plant is widely being regarded as a major R&D breakthrough. Green jute will not only be used for producing pulp and paper. It will also be utilised for producing rayon grade pulp and staple fibre for the textile industry in the process, the innovation will open up new vistas for the beleaguered natural fibre.

Devising use of jute for manufacturing pulp and paper seems to have come at an opportune time. The world pulp and paper industry had been going through a prolonged period of recession till just about a year back. Pulp prices plunged by more than half,

investment is needed to set up industries. However, we lack funds to invest. So we are courting FDI assiduously. The Bangladesh Investment Conference held in the city last week marks the latest major move in this area. Still, it's worth remembering that a new product, by itself, can attract FDI. This is happening with green jute. Then again, one of the basics of export drive is that you create goods to sell abroad. You need new products to expand exports.

For instance, BCSIR has developed a fairly wide range of products based on locally produced soybean. Other products brought out by this institution include a ready-to-mix tea, a weaning baby food with pulse powder as a principal ingredient. Some of these products could probably be exported with a bit of adaptation and the support of appropriate marketing technique. There could be other new products elsewhere too, waiting to be fully developed for commercial application.

Search for new products merits a rating on our list of priorities. Government could allocate more funds for R&D. It could also steer the private sector towards spending more on R&D, by extending meaningful tax breaks and other incentives. Even the GATT sponsored world trade agreement's subsidy reduction programme makes certain exceptions for outlay on R&D. New products to emerge call for support and patronage. The ongoing reform and restructuring of trade and industry should embrace R&D as well.



promote and support activities in such priority areas. Thus it is that we have a number of specialised institutions for agricultural research and they have come up too with new products, such as improved strains of rice. The state-funded Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) seems to have concentrated on bringing out new food products, designed to improve the quality of our diet. Given our priorities, it could not perhaps be otherwise.

As for R&D for trade and industry, sporadic reports of private initiatives to develop new products do come up. Among these accounts that I came across during the last

performance these days. Finding new applications of jute through chemical conversion of the plant is widely being regarded as a major R&D breakthrough. Green jute will not only be used for producing pulp and paper. It will also be utilised for producing rayon grade pulp and staple fibre for the textile industry in the process, the innovation will open up new vistas for the beleaguered natural fibre.

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RAPID industrialization and export expansion are our priority areas

UN System's Moving Spirit is No More

IT was the tie that Mr Grant, the Unicef Chief, was wearing that attracted my attention. Printed in bright colours, it looked like an art work of a child. Yes, he said, this is a new weapon of our advocacy drive. He stepped back into the bedroom of his hotel suite, and came out with a collection of six ties which he showed me. They were all based on art work done by kids. Ties made from these designs are sold to raise funds for children's projects. 'We use every possible item to advocate for the rights and problems of children. Yes, the indefatigable crusader for the children's right was at it again. Preaching about children's rights even through what he wore. Next time you will probably be wearing a jacket with children's paintings all over it? There are limits,' he assured me with a smile, of how far I will go. Those who know him, and work with him are not so sure.

James P Grant, born, in China, in 1922, is the grand old man of the UN system. At 72, he is going ever so strong, with his relentless advocacy for the rights of children. From an obscure demand, on the fringe of the development debate, Grant has, single-handedly, brought the children's rights issue at the very centre of the global debate.

Combining child health, infant mortality, maternal health and child care, the focus on children now encompasses the core of the Human Resource Development challenge. Currently visiting Bangladesh in connection with the JCGP (Joint Consultative Group on Policies, a club of five UN agencies — UNDP, UNFPA, IFAD, WFP and UNICEF) to work out joint strategies on their respective agency programmes, Grant was his ever go-getting self. His colleagues lovingly complain. He is just unstoppable.

How was his cause progressing? The natural optimist that he is, said that with all the new problems that the world faced — Somalia, Bosnia,

Undoubtedly the most respected and revered head of any UN body, James P Grant, head of Unicef for the last 15 years passed away in New York yesterday. Active till the very end, he brought children's issues at the very centre of national planning in most countries of the world. He pricked our conscience for not doing enough for our children and shamed governments and leaders to publicly committing more for children in their development plans.

James Grant had a special meaning for Bangladesh. He came to Bangladesh several times, and personally oversaw the growth of Unicef country programme for us. During his last visit in early 1994, The Daily Star editor, Mahfuz Anam, interviewed him at his hotel suite. Today we reproduce the piece published on 8 February 1994, as a mark of respect to his memory.

Afghanistan etc. — there was an overall sense of positive momentum as far as the cause of children was concerned. Nineteen-ninety marked the watershed, according to him. It was the year in which the World Conference for Basic Education for All was held, followed by the ratification of the Convention on Children and finally the Child Summit, which was held towards the end of the year. All this gave an altogether new direction for solving the problems of children. The issues of education, primary health care and basic needs, came into the centre stage of global debate. James P Grant of Unicef had a lot to do with that development.

'How do you motivate the recalcitrant government to move faster on implementation of international principles and conventions?' The answer is the direct approach, Grant said. 'I try and get the head of state, or the head of the government, personally involved. It is made out to be his or her personal agenda. Social sectors are multi-ministerial affairs, and the best way to get them

going is to involve the head of the government. Then, of course, we help the governments in the implementation process. Not only Unicef, but all UN agencies do that. Thirdly, we urge private sector to do things. Condition should be so created through private initiative that it becomes 'bad politics' not to take action on children's issues. This is achieved by creating public opinion, which then forces governmental action.'

'For example, we are now pressing for a formula called 20-20 (taken, I suppose, from a very popular TV news programme in the US). Under this formula we are propagating, that 20 per cent of all ODA (Official Development Assistance) and 20 per cent of national resources should be devoted to education, health and family planning. Isn't it all ready the case? Not in most countries,' he replied.

Is there any major obstacle he is facing, which is getting him bogged down? According to the Unicef boss, fund raising is becoming tougher. This is so especially because there are



now more claimants to the shrinking foreign aid fund. Russia, East Europe, the Central Asian Republics, and the disaster countries like Somalia, Bosnia and Afghanistan are also taking away a lot of money. UN Peacekeeping is another new fund claimant. 'US alone paid extra 1 billion US dollars for peacekeeping last year,' he informed.

population was going to be impossible. But with population control, our chances appeared much better. Recently there was a Summit conference in New Delhi, of nine most populous countries with the highest illiteracy rates. They were Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, Indonesia, India, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan. In the conference, China, Indonesia and Mexico were identified as countries well on track to provide 80 per cent of their children with effective primary education by the year 2000.

Then there were India, Brazil and Egypt, identified as being able to get on track, if significant efforts were to be made. Then there was the third group of countries, nam-

ely Bangladesh and Nigeria, where a near miraculous effort was necessary to put these two countries on track. Grant recalls that such a miraculous effort was made in Bangladesh when child immunisation rate went from 2 per cent to 70 per cent in five years. So a miracle can happen.

Finally the Delhi Summit identified Pakistan, in the words of Mahbubul Haq, the former Pakistani Finance Minister and the main mover behind the UNDP Human Development Report, as the 'impossible' case. The Unicef chief of course, refuses to take any case as 'impossible' and believes that Pakistan can also turn the corner and come on track.

Given the considerable experience that you have as the head of Unicef (for 14 years now) what would be some of your words of wisdom for us in the developing world? According to the veteran international civil servant, and one of the architects of the UN system's development agenda, the answer is straight forward. 'A country needs three things to move forward: a) political will; b) public mobilization; and c) social and developmental agenda set in easily understandable and achievable terms. Bangladesh appears to have made considerable progress in many fields — population control, workable programme on primary education, non-governmental programmes like Grameen Bank and BRAC. 'It is my feeling that Bangladesh is in a position to make a major breakthrough in its development agenda. But the question is, will it have the political stability to allow that developmental momentum to take off?' Grant asks. A million dollar question. We sure wish we knew the answer.

Meanwhile, we in Bangladesh wish this oldest-young man (scidom have I seen a man more energetic, committed and open to new ideas and innovation) all the luck in his global task which, in effect, are our own.

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.

Dilip Kumar

Sir, The 73-years-old evergreen film legend Dilip Kumar has just visited Dhaka. He had and continues to have millions of fans — old and young, men and women — in this part of the sub-continent for over last half a century.

We are grateful that the hosts concerned arranged a public reception at the Mirpur Stadium in honour of Dilip Kumar, one of the greatest living film idols of the 20th century. This enabled people from all walks of life to quench their thirst of seeing and hearing Dilip Kumar in person and to fulfil their life-long dream.

We are confident that this visit of Dilip Kumar to Dhaka would further strengthen the

existing cultural and historical ties between Bangladesh and India.

May we request Dilip Kumar to visit Dhaka at least once every year and thereby help strengthen the fraternal bonds between the peoples of these two independent countries?

We are hopeful that because of his mounting popularity and also for the boundless love and affection of our people for him, Dilip Kumar, can play an important role in solving various common political and economic problems between India and Bangladesh and act as an Ambassador of Peace between the two countries.

O H Kabir Dhaka

Inter-continental Cup soccer

Sir, European champions, Denmark clinched the Second Inter-continental Cup Football title by beating the 14-times South American champions Argentina 2-0 at Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia. Both the teams were reportedly without some of the key players because of their prior engagements in the European and the South American soccer league matches. The four other teams viz African champions Nigeria, Asian runners-up Saudi Arabia and the North and Central American champions Mexico brought their best sides; yet they failed to stop the march of the teams from two traditional rival continents. Many a critics foresee the infiltration of the African side to win the next World Cup in France. But I do not think they will. No doubt the African nations have made a remarkable progress, and they have the potentialities to beat a number of nations of Europe and South America, but the

time to set a team from a once backward continent to win World Cup is still far away.

Mexico has been attacked with the tie-breaking phobia. They once again lost an important match in a tie-breaker, this time to Denmark, the eventual champions. In 1986 they were beaten by Germany in the same way, which was again repeated in the 1994 World Cup second round match. At home the players should practise shooting into the net. The teams from Asia produced a lamentable performance, far worse than they did in 1994 World Cup. Japan conceded as many as eight goals against one in favour while Saudi Arabia swallowed four goals against naught whereas these Saudis beat Morocco and Belgium and were unlucky to have lost to Holland and Sweden, the eventual third place winners. In the last Asian soccer, their second team went down to China, the eventual runners-up in quarter-finals, yet they showed the signs of potentialities to reach the final round of 1996 Olympic Soccer Final. On the

other hand Japan, the surprise 1992 Asian Cup Soccer Champions drew a sharp criticism among the supporters by way of winning one match only, drawing in two matches and losing one to make exit their before reaching semifinals on home ground.

In the absence of the Oceanian champions Australia, the competition cannot be classified as a full fledged tournament. Actually teams from the said continent had been so far facing queer FIFA laws in their way to reach the final round of World Cup soccer. However, FIFA amended laws by taking the winners of the Oceanian group in the Asian zone i.e. the Oceanian winners shall face the fourth place winners of Asia before going to the final round. It is our expectations that in the next Inter-continental Cup we shall watch a team from Oceania boost the standard of the competition.

In fine, we may say that Asia is lagging far behind than Europe and South America in spite of the fact that suddenly one or two teams dazzle in the

World Cup soccer. The AFC must chalk out extensive plans for the betterment of soccer in this region.

A T M Nurun Nabi Dhaka

Railway Wagons

Sir, Goods and cargo carrying sector of the Railway is supposed to be its main profit earning source. But unfortunately, the Bangladesh Railway has failed to manage the sector well. Once the various tea estates mainly depended on the railway for carrying their goods but now it is very much felt that this mode of goods transportation should be avoided as much as possible. Movement of the railway wagons at a snails pace indicates that the authority is least bothered to ascertain its reaching to a destination in time.

Such an uncertainty must have a negative impact on its valued clients of the tea industry.

Morus Samad Choudhury Phulioia Tea Estate, Sylhet