Dhaka, Tuesday, February 7, 1995

Capital Punishment for Women's Repression

We welcome the bill introduced on Sunday in the Jatiya Sangsad seeking to provide for stiff punishment, including death penalty, for certain grievous offences against women and children. We are all for its passage into law as soon as possible. No doubt, an opposition in the House would have taken the occasion to criticise the performance of the government on the ever-deteriorating situation of women and children being subjected to criminal violence. But they surely would also have given hands-down support to the bill.

We have with us proof that capital punishment works effectively as a deterrent in certain situations and at least for some time. Midway in the eighties cases of death and disfigurement of girls as a result of acid throwing increased frighteningly. Enactment of death as a punishment for the rime and implementation of that in one or two ases had striking effect on decreasing the freiency of the crime.

There are, however, many steps standing besen a killer of his wife or his maid servant or a vist of a school girl and his trial and punishnt. What will guarantee that child molestation dowry persecutions will not continue with

inity with police averting their attention the criminals - whether for their own n or their superiors' in the ministries or of illies in the parties? Capital punishment for sion of women and children must not be 1 to go the way of the campus murders olitical umbrellas unfurled to protect the with po crimina

projected new law is an act of necessity, This that will help the society to live. somethi nust not be allowed to undo this. Once **Politics** protection of criminals has been ended political as a rulir ig practice, the administration and society can o nly then take on the question of police corruption I that makes law and justice ineffective special by it is the areas of security of man and more so of we man. Corruption in police and other state organs a re spawned directly by political corrup-

Trade with India

on has been adopted in a dialogue on rade imbalance, held in New Delhi Indo-Bangla \ and 2. Held jointly by the Centre on February 1 arch of New Delhi and the Centre for Policy Resea que of Dhaka, it prognosticated for Policy Dialo ing trade gap were not rolled that if the grow be a heavier political cost enback, there could al ties in the future. tailed in the bilater.

'ency thoughtfully expressed The sense of urg Indian capital is well-appreon this score in the h hopes that the new idiom ciated in Dhaka whic. concrete terms, preferably will get translated in

within a time-frame.

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"t capacity is limited, but Agreed that our expo India can help us overce me this shortcoming as the much bigger economy with a great potential , whatever little export to be generous. First of all into a fuller play with base we have needs to come India. This would be only possible if the latter removes the tariffs and quar ititative restrictions on Bangladesh's principal e xportables to that country. Bangladesh's case for a relaxation in the rigid trade regime of India is st. ong when viewed in the context of liberalised tractle terms she ofters to India.

In this particular respect we welcome the assurance given by the Indian Finance Minister Man Mohan Singh that India would take appropriate budgetary measures to reduce the trade gap with Bangladesh. This is as it should be because the Indian economy is on a reform course, expected to be accommodative to a trading partner which has kept its part of the bargain by lowering her

tariffs.

Another way of expanding Bangla desh's export base with an eye to complementairity between the two markets would be to set up inutually advantageous industries on the eastern side of Bangladesh - "geared to cater to the north-east Indian market." Collaboration projects under buyback arrangements can be a big help in reducing trade imbalance on a durable footing. Our point of view is - there can be mutually beneficial products differentiation between the two countries to allow mutually lucrative market inter-penetration.

We strongly endorse regular bilateral consultations with a focus on exchange rate or interest rate policies.

Credit Support Cycle

The raising of the small credit ceilin, g from Tk 30 to 50 lakh in the industrial and agr. icultural investment sectors is a piece of good nevvs. The tiding rings even better as the size of the clientele is to expand with a linkage to the safety net scheme. The voluntarily - retired personnel and non-resident Bangladeshis willing to invest he."e will benefit from the small credit guarantee facil-

Against the backdrop of increases in credit disbursements in the industrial and farming sectors — estimated to be 50 per cent and 30 per cent respectively from the last year's levels — one feels a certain toning up of the economy's productive muscles. But hardly enough because the levels we are indexing these to were themselves very low. We are yet to make the transition from a sluggish to a buoyant economy which is largely a matter for successful lending operations and, has to do with the still-elusive micro-economic

successes A new ground can really be broken if the lending rates are further reduced and, by all the commercial banks, which we believe, the NCBs have committed themselves to doing before the Finance Minister in the meeting that raised the

credit ceiling.

The minister's emphasis on simplification of the loan disbursement procedure which still remains cumbersome despite achieving a reasonable degree of decentralisation of sanctioning power strikes a responsive chord with us. Having investment cells with two officers each in the regional offices of banks can expedite matters. However, promoting a brand new class of young entrepreneurs would require an extension of counselling and guidance services. At any rate, we must fling open a window for the traditional crafts.

is now nearly nine mon ths since the opposition walked out of parliament and nearly a full month has gone by since they actually resigned from parliament. In this time Sir Ninian Stephens has come and gone. Sundry negotiations between government and opposition have bloomed and faded in rapid order. Upto the 28th of December. Bangladesh held its breath in the hope that a settlement would be brokered which would establish the principle of elections held under a caretaker government and bring the opposition back into the Sangshad. We had come close to this point. Agreement was at hand on the following political issues:

Elections cannot be held under the exclusive authority of the sitting government. This was once a firm ar ticle of faith with the incumbent government. They have now come round to the view that the political realities of Bangladesh demand that if a general election is to be credible it cannot be run solely by a sitting government. This acceptance by the government implies that the opposition demand for elections under a caretaker government has now been conceded by the government. What has remained an issue between the government and opposition was the character and authority of this caretaker government. (ii) The sitting Prime

Minister would vacate the office of Prime Minister 30 days prior to the election date and would hand over executive power to a caretaker govern ment. This step was formally announced to the world in the form of a letter of agreement presented to the opposition by leaders of the ruling party around 9 pm on 28th December jus! at the time when the letter's of resignations from the opposition parties in the Sangshad were being presented to the Speaker. This was indeed a radical step forward by the government who had all along made the issue of the continuity in office of the Prime Minister through the election, into a non-negotiable issue. This concession by the government was thus a substantive advance on the Ninian proposal which had envisaged a national government. drawn from members of the outgoing parliament, made up of five persons nominated by the government and five by the opposition but with the Prime Minister, remaining one of the five government nominees thereby continuing in the office of Prime Minister.

The opposition had found the Ninian proposal unacceptable Decause it perpetuated the incumbency of the Prime Minister. The opposition had proposed, on grounds of principle, that the caretaker government conducting the polls should be made up exclusively of political non-combatants. The offer of the Prime Minister to step down from office was thus a substantive concession by the government in relation to their

original posit ion. Points of Contention

As of today the one point of substance which appears to be in contention between the government and opposition appears to be over the character of the caretakter government which will preside over the elections. The or iginal opposition demand was for a non-aligned government i.nspired by and on the l'ines of the caretaker government of President Shahabuddin vyhich is accepted by most peop le to have presided over Ban, gladesh's first really free election. The government had opposed the Shahabuddin model on the grounds that it would require an amendment to the constitution to empower a nonelected caretaker government to hold office. This point is recognised by the opposition who always argued for and continue to argue for the government to move a bill in parliament to so amend the constitution. The government had however held firm to its original position that under no circumstance should the constitution be amended. This implied that the government stands by the Ninian proposal of a 5+5 government but now with someone from the ruling party other than the incumbent Prime Minister, serving as Chief Executive.

Narrowing the Differences As it stands however both

for a job well done.

S A Mansoor Gulshan, Dhaka.

How about a

Sir. With the beginning of

dates for hartal a year ahead so that we could put off our important assignments and many other schedules like examination, seminar, wedding, travelmany as this kind of premoni-

ling etc on that day, and would preferably devote ourselves n ore to an alternate day. This tyl e of calender would certain ly save lot of troubles for tory s chedule would perhaps alert us beforehand so that many of us would try to make up the lo sses accordingly on

alternate da 'ys. This harta'l calendar would

by Rehman Sobhan

headed by the President they must have realised that this will require an amendment to the constitution to legally empower the President to function as Chief Executive of the Government of Bangladesh. If the government has thus conceded that they would resile from their once inflexible position about maintaining the sanctity of the constitution there would have been no difficulty in making a further provision to make possible the induction of an Advisory Council of non-partisan persons to assist the President in his caretaker responsibilities. as happened during the caretaker rule of President Shahabuddin. This would have fully met the demand of the opposition who had all along argued the need for a constitutional amendment. If the government had gone

all the way in meeting all these demands of the opposition. presumably in the interest of

This historic announcement would have brought relief to an anxious nation and kudos for our political leaders for their gestures of statesmanship.

With this historic opportunity to restore a nation's flagging faith in our democratic institutions and political leadership at hand why then did the government so delay the process? What was the need when the government side presented their offer to the opposition at the last minute. to add on a rather provocative codocil to the Prime Minister's offer to step down, that the opposition forego hartals and oboradhs. The government must have known that this was not a labour negotiation and that in any case such a commitment was ultra vires of the constitution since you cannot usurp the right of dissent, nor can you enforce this since other parties in parliament, not signatories to the agreement, as well as militant

New Year's day by the leaders

provocative its tone, in its stride. At that stage the opposition could have spelt out the apparent points of agreement implicit in the shifting positions of the government, taken these as a sign of agreement on points of principle and ignored the objectionable postscript on hartals. The opposition could have then taken the position that they would accept the positive points on offer by the government, including the willingness of the Prime Minister to step down and the offer of a caretaker government under the President, as tokens of good intention by the government and would therefore put their resignation from parliament in suspense upto midnight of New Year's Eve. In these next three days the two teams of senior leaders would have worked out an agreement which could have been jointly announced to the nation on

Political Impasse: Clarifying the Issues Considering that agreement in principle on all key points have apparently been reached between the two parties the nation seeks an explanation as to why we remain in a state of crisis and why acts of political statesmanship remain at such a discount. The pursuit of any further solutions to the impasse will be made easier by a clarifica-

tion of the immediate background to the crisis and an appreciation of the true intentions of the contending parties. It is somewhat improbable that the opposition can now undo their resignation. There is little evidence that they are even considering this. Nor is there any sign that the government is making the slightest effort to coax the opposition back into the Sangshad by putting before them the inducement of a special set of proposals, incorporating in unambiguous terms, all the points of agreement identified above. Some elements of this offer, such as the necessary legislation to empower the President and to establish a non-partisan advisory council, would of necessity require the presence of the opposition in the Sangshad. If both parties have thus come to terms with the demise of the present Sangshad then the question remains whether the burial will take place peacefully through negotiation over the yet unresolved issue of the terms of the forthcoming national election or this matter will be resolved through confrontation on the streets. It is perhaps here that all those concerned with the future of democracy in Bangladesh may apply their minds during the relative peace of Holy Ramzan. Our political leaders as well

painful impaisse in our polity.

as all citizens must realise that there is already a growing disenchantment within the voting public with the direction of our political life. There is a widespread feeling that the political parties are becoming increasingly divorced from the more pressing concerns of their constituents. This growing public disillusion with the prevailing course of democratic politics is ominous for the future of democracy in Bangladesh. Any political crisis, however small, if it is allowed to linger is like a small wound without treatment. It could become cancerous and eventually grow to corrode the vitals of our democratic polity.

If we now have a situation where agreement between government and opposition on the main points of substance have been established why then is the opposition still in the streets and the Speaker continues to preside over a half empty House?

will draw upon an advisory council made up of outgoing members of parliament or of non-political advisors as suggested by the Awami League.

government and opposition

have modified their respective

positions over the character of

Both sides have now agreed

that the Chief Executive to

head the interim government

will be the incumbent

President of Bangladesh, who

was a nominee of the ruling

party and presumably still

continues to be a member of

the BNP. However, notwith-

standing the partisan political

position of the President, the

opposition have conceded to

let him head a caretaker gov-

ernment provided he rules

through a non-political advi-

sory council on the lines of the

Shahabuddin Advisory Council.

At the current moment the

government position on this

issue is somewhat vague. It is

not clear if the government

envisages the President exer-

cising exclusive executive

powers during the interim

phase, aided by Secretaries to

the government or whether he

the caretaker government.

What is however significant is that the consensus between the government and opposition over the President head ing the interim government may itself require an amendment to the constitution, since, under the present constitution, the President can exercise no such executive powers needed to head an interim government. If, by definition, the government has now agreed to amend the constitution to vest the powers of a chief executive with the President, then the last remaining difference of substance between the government and opposition would now appear to be resolved. It would follow that the necessary bill vesting executive powers on the President to preside over an interim government could also make provision for a non-political advisory council to the President to assist him in running the interim government.

What is the Problem?

If we now have a situation where agreement between government and opposition on the main points of substance have been established why then is the opposition still in the streets and the Speaker continues to preside over a half empty House?

Inevitably, different parties have different explanations for the impasse. Questions are being posed by the public to both parties to explain the impasse. People are naturally anxious to learn from the government why, having in principle conceded all three points demanded by the opposition, on the principle of ensuring free and fair elections under caretaker government, over the resignation of the Prime Minister and over the need for a constitutional amendment to empower the President to head a caretaker government, why the government left it to the last minute of 28 December, to concede these

points. The government, through out this critical political confrontation appears to have demonstrated indecision which has led them to act well after the opportune moment has passed. Thus, had the government conceded the need for a caretaker government in the immediate few months after the opposition had raised it in the house some nine months ago, it is likely that an a greement, within the constitution, on the basis of the 5+5 Nii lian proposal, including the presence of the Prime Minister as head of the caretaker go vernment, could have been reached long ago and all these months of political tension could have been avoided. At a later date, had the offer of the Prime: Minister to step down been 1 made during or immediately after the Ninian negotiation, the 5+5 solution with the Prin ne Minister stepping down 30 days before the election could have been accepted and con, stitutional proprieties kept int act. Finally if the government I lad agreed to

preserving our democratic institutions, then this set of offers, incorporated in a single package, could have been delivered informally to the opposition through a meeting between the two Deputy Leaders of the House and other senior members of both sides, well before the 28th. Thus agreement could have been reached on the underlying principles of the caretaker government. On the basis of these discussions the opposition could then have committed themselves to withdraw their resignations and return to the Sangshad. This agreement could have been jointly announced by both leaders over the national media before 28th December with the added provision that the details of legislation to empower the caretaker government, the actual responsibilities of this government when in office, measures to further strengthen the Election Commission and a code of conduct for the elections, could have been worked out by a Joint Parliamentary Committee once the opposi

workers, Prokrichi and any other group of malcontents would remain free to call strikes in the future. A more sensible approach would have suggested that once an agreement on political fundamentals had been reached both parties would commit themselves to work jointly to maintain a peaceful environment both in the Sangshad and on the streets so that the House would live out its tenure without further disruption. To place a demand for political peace as a 'take it or leave it' proposition, at a moment of charged political emotions and the minute hand approaching midnight, either reflected unusual lack of political maturity or more seriously it suggested an agenda to actually provoke the opposition to re-

Questions are also being raised over the opposition's own lack of statesmanship at a critical political hour in the nation's life. A statesmanlike response by the opposition to the crisis would have been to take the last minute offer of the government, however

position. What a happy New Year that might have promised for the people of Bangladesh! For the opposition, many of whose leaders have a rather longer track record in political life than that on offer within the government, to have been so provoked into a resignation. again remains somewhat incomprehensible. It could of course be argued that elements on both sides have always remained inimical to a settlement and actually wanted to provoke a confrontation on the streets. In this event such possibilities as indicated above would appear to have been non-existent or perhaps improbable. Point at Issue

of the government and the op-

I am in no way adequately informed to pass judgement on the inner motivations and private agendas of the contending parties. These will no doubt be revealed by the passage of time. For the moment the point at issue remains whether the nation is to be exposed to another period of tension or whether some solution can be formed to spare the nation this

Arabs, Israelis Play Game of Peace

game of peace" between Arabs Israelis, with the latter believed to be holding most of the eards. marks the start of the new

tion returned to the house.

The 45-year Arab-Israeli conflict and the strategic United States alliance with Israel raise serious questions about who gets the upperhand under the planned Middle Eastern Economic Market.

Political analysts said Israel would, in effect, be exchanging Arab land for Arab capital. But the catch is. Palestinians would have only partial sovereignty over their territories while Israel would be allowed full access to Arab economies.

Israel has been campaigning for a Middle Eastern economic system through all its bilateral and multilateral talks. Securing a position as the central economic power in the region is Israel's immediate priority. analysts believe.

Optimistic that a peaceful settlement to the protracted Middle Eastern conflict is on hand, Israel is now working out an ambitious three-phase plan to set up a regional econ-

The first step involves Gaza and Jericho; the second focuses on economic alliances with Jordan and the Palestinian entity; and the third aims to establish Israel as the centre of the Middle East Market.

Many Arab political and economic analysts argue that Israel can only implement its three-phase plan if Arab states remain incapable of resolving their own inter-Arab conflicts and fail to reactivate plans for Arab cooperation and solidar-

The ambitious plan by Israel to develop its image as a regional superpower at the heart of economic affairs in the region is expected to have serious repercussions for other centres such as Lebanon,

Mounir B Abboud writes from Beirut

Securing a position as the central economic power in the region is Israel's immediate priority

Bahrain and Egypt.

The Lebanese, in general, fear that the opening of borders to Israel will put their country in unfair competition with the latter which has an advanced industry, not to mention billions of dollars in aid from the US and the world

A prominent economist, Dr Salim Hoss, said, "Lebanon would be the main country to suffer (under the proposed economic partnership between Israel and the Palestinians as provided for by the peace accord).

As a result of 17 years of

civil war, which prevented tourists from coming to Lebanon and petrodollar funds from being invested here, economic experts say the challenge of a Middle East Market to the country is formidable. Dr Elias Saba, member of the Parliament and former nunister of finance, pointed out that Lebanon began to prosper following the Arab economic boycott of Israel. Beirut's seaport became a big transit centre while the Israeli port at Haifa was closed to Arab trade.

On the other hand, the new economic system is expected to benefit Israel the most. It is expected to lead in planning Palestinian economic policy, including administering donations from the West and the Arab world, particularly the Gulf. The lack of a developed infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza will make it difficult for Palestinians to absorb donations.

According to a study by the Tel Aviv University, Israel could increase its export revenues annually by 22 per cent if it started selling even to just five Arab states. The Arab economic boycott is said to have cost Israel US\$42 billion between 1952 and 1992.

Others, however, believe the Arab boycott of Israel did not effectively weaken the country's military and economic capabilities. On the contrary, they say the boycott strengthened the Israeli economy. They note that the US and Europeans were reluctant to furnish the Arabs with new technology due to the boycott.

Businessmen economists alike wonder not only whether Arab economies are prepare to deal with Israel but also whether the future can bring closer economic relations between opposing sides. Arab experts have missed feelings concerning what is being heralded as the end of war and the beginning of peace and prosperity. The main area of contention

seems to be the question of how a Regional Common Market beneficial to all parties can be built and how economic trade relations, in general, can be structured so that the Arabs can protect their resources and markets. Other problem areas are international assistance and investments, which are expected to flow into the region and, the utilization of such funds.

Experts say Israel's neighbouring countries would be the most likely candidates for a new economic environment if Arab-Israeli relations continue to improve.

They note that the economies of these countries currently suffer from a number of problems, including low public sector production capacities, high production costs and unsophisticated public sector agricultural and industrial technologies.

The private sector, mean-

while, is relatively small and its efforts to establish labour intensive projects have not met demand. In most of these countries, there are elaborate social security systems and subsidies for education, health and transportation which are not matched by an appropriate amount of high-quality produc-

tion to pay for these services. At the same time, experts say the Israeli economy is similar to market-oriented capitalist systems which are based on production and wellequipped to deal with foreign

markets.

Some experts say, in the end, the rules of the market will prevail and the balance of Arab-Israeli economic relations will be determined by the laws of relative advantage in resources and products. In this regard, Israeli industries would have an advantage in entering Arab markets. The ability of Israel to obtain natural resources from the other countries in the region will make it easier for its industries to grow and become

more profitable. But more investment by American, European and even Israeli companies in the Arab world would enable the transfer of technology to Arab counfries without obstacles.

The presence of three factors — natural resources, manpower and a nearby consumer market - makes the establishment of a common market a strong possibility.

Many analysts say the competition between the Arabs and Israelis would quickly move from the military arena to the economic sphere.

Initially, each side will try to get ahead of the other before moderating their competitiveness to reach some degree of cooperation to conserve resources. Subsequently, a stage of integration among markets and industries could follow.

- Depthnews Asia

Salute to a man of principle

Sir, The news of Chief Justice Shahabuddin retiring is sad for those who appreciate integrity, honesty and principles.

His guidance of the nation on its transition to democracy is a shining example of service before self. Borrowing hate Churchill's words "Never in the rebirth of democracy in Bangladesh has so much be owed by so many to so few," now to the one man at the helm of the ship of state to lead it to safety from a stormy

Have we shown him the

honour and appreciation that Calendar'? I would rather sugalso bring a good profit for the the year around. he deserves? Perhaps we as a nation lack the magnani mity. But I am sure he will have the satisfaction of being Bangladesh's "friend in need, a friend indeed". Thank you Sir

a caretaker g'overnment

hartal calendar!

the new year everyone must be pleased to get a calendar, and of course if it is beautiful and an important one indeed. But how about having a 'Hartal

gest seriously than sarcastically opposition as people would to the opposition to set aside some specific and probable endar

rather prefer to buy such a calwith yellow/blue marked opposition holidays to the one with red marked government holidays. The calendar could also be decorated with pictures like stone pelting street urchins, deserted roads, broken and burning vehicles, processions, demonstrations and many more pictures of hartal interest.

My suggestion might sound weird and cynical but I am sure that a common citizen like me who wishes to stay away from being the victim of hartal would preferably consider this calendar as vital for

Md Jalaluddin Igbal

Mohammadpur. Dhaka.

Kuakata tourist spot

Sir, Kuakata in Patuakhali district is a beautiful place which can be easily developed into a wonderful tourist spot with a little imagination and proper planning. It can be a good tourist attraction both for local and overseas tourists. But for reasons not known Parjatan Corporation is not taking the much required initiative and

interest in the matter. To develop it as a tourist

spot, the communication net work should be developed first. Then a number of motels and rest-houses should be con structed for comfortable stay of the tourists. It is not unlikely that Parjatan Corporation can run these proposed motels efficiently and profitably. So after construction these may be leased out to private parties.

beauty. Will the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism look

Planned and careful tree plan-

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment.

tation in the area can add to its