

Problem with Plenitude

In a country known for its endemic want of daily necessities, it is hard to believe that a produce can ever become a problem not because of its scarcity but for its plentifulness.

The fact that Munshiganj is no hinterland did not deter us to let go the economic opportunity the farmers thoroughly deserved.

The problem stems from a combination of the government's policy failures and market manipulations by the traders.

Production and marketing are interlinked. In our case the government continues to give sermons to our farmers for producing more.

Academic Jams

The vagaries of national politics, coupled with the students' own variety of armed slanging matches, are said to be putting to nought the various university authorities' bid to clear the backlog of academic sessions.

This is despite the fact that Dhaka University has exemplarily prepared an academic calendar setting the examination dates firmly rather than leaving this to future meetings of the syndicate.

That is no doubt one aspect of the problem but its another highly injurious element happens to be a particular student front's terrorisation of the campuses.

It is necessary therefore to comprehend afresh the connection between the conduct of the major political parties and that of their student fronts.

Why the Embargo?

While the UN Security Council has renewed the crippling four and a half year-old ban on Iraqi oil sales and the US tries to ensure it in cooperation with the Gulf monarchies, the oil embargo has practically lost touch with the ground reality.

In addition to the loosely maintained surveillance on the international waters, the US is now for maritime inspection in the Gulf as a concentrated measure to keep the embargo going.

Furthermore, lured by the oil wealth of Iraq, the second largest reserve in the world, after that of Saudi Arabia, and inspired by its super-abundance — selling in Iraq at a fraction of even the price of drinking water there —, twenty western firms have reached tentative supply agreements with Iraq.

So crippling has been the impact of the economic sanctions on Iraq that one has to spend a week's salary to buy a dozen of eggs.

FIFTY years ago, on 26 1945, the Charter of the United Nations was signed by the founding fathers. In ringing words the historic document proclaimed that the peoples of the United Nations were determined "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."

The end of the Cold War has made it possible for the UN to refocus attention on the pressing issues of global concern including the economic and social problems of the poor nations.

It is a matter of some satisfaction that after decades of neglect the question of development has now been placed at the top of the global agenda.

To the Editor

Dialogue of the deaf Sir, Mahfuz Anam's yet another plea for a fruitful political dialogue (Third View 1.3.95), despite year-long massive failures, if read with veteran politician Oli Ahad's bold write-up entitled "A case for transparent leadership" (DS 28.2.95) and S A M S Kibria's warning against the danger of the current trend of politicalisation of administration (DS 2.3.95), will, perhaps, sum up the 'whole truth' about the inevitability of the coming doomsday.

Naturally a question arises in the minds of us to how these leaders manage their talks in foreign countries? For instance, our prime minister during her visit to India last year not only discussed with veteran Indian politicians, including Narasimha Rao, but also had informal chats with

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



viewed against the perspective of development. As a result, today the concept of "sustainable development" has become an integral part of the philosophy of healthy economic development.

The factors impeding on social change and progress are so numerous that it would be difficult to short-list them. Three major themes were, therefore, chosen to ensure that the conference could concentrate on the key factors which will play a decisive role in social change in the years ahead.

Living in one of the poorest countries of the world, we should have no difficulty in appreciating the need to accord the highest priority to the eradication of poverty.

The employment picture in the poor countries such as ours is grim.

World-wide, about 40 per cent of rural women work without wages on their families' farms.

I could quote many more data to show how this issue has become a key factor in ensuring political and social stability.

The third theme, social disintegration, is really the result of the first two. Conflict, a symptom of disintegration, has claimed more than 20 million lives since 1945.

Dialogue of the deaf

veteran Indian journalists. Only recently the leader of the opposition exchanged pleasantries with the American leaders during breakfast in the company of the US President.

Perhaps, the 'deaf and dumb' games still persist in the political horizon. The opposition's reluctance to respond to the prime minister's latest 'invitation' to the opposition for a fresh and direct talks indicate that the last lota of wisdom has been eaten up by intransigence.

In a democratic society egotism is forbidden. I have a word of praise for "The Daily Star" which, undaunted by many futile exercises in the past, has again offered its valuable spaces, perhaps, in a last ditch bid to 'untying the Gordian knot' of politics in Bangladesh.

By all indications a general election is in the offing. It will be futile to whip a 'dead horse'. Let us all join hands to pave the way for our future generations to live in peace and prosperity.

Abdul Kader, Bashabo, Dhaka

produced a massive flow of refugees and forced migration. The brain-drain from Bangladesh is certainly a socially debilitating factor.

The Social Summit has issued a 10-point Declaration after intense debate, primarily between the developed and developing nation. An unprecedented 118 heads of state and government attended the Summit.

The rich countries have, of course, avoided so far the financial responsibilities for implementing these decisions but their hypocrisy is getting increasingly exposed.

The emerging role of the NGOs in these conferences is a relatively new phenomenon. As

a molder of public perception on different questions they create the necessary public interest and support for different social programmes. At the Copenhagen Summit the NGOs acted as a powerful driving force behind the scene.

Instead of lecturing the international community about our social achievements, which by all accounts are meagre, we should learn from the experience of other developing countries and reorient our own development strategy by accord higher priority to the social sector.

Our future hinges on our success in this effort.

Looking Back at

March towards Independence

March 19, 1971

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, President of Awami League, strongly condemned the firing on the unarmed people at Joydevpur earlier in the day.

Talking to newsmen, he said: "If they think they can suppress people's struggle by bullet and force, they simply live in a fool's paradise."

He added it was an "uncalled for" action. The Awami League Chief said he wondered how army could go to the Joydevpur Bazar when Martial Law authorities had stated that troops had already been withdrawn to the barracks.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said the people of Bangladesh were no doubt in favour of peaceful settlement of the problems but that could not mean that the people "can be frightened by the use of force. No power on earth can suppress the people when they are prepared to shed blood."

In reply to a question, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said he had already sent some of his partymen to the spot and added it could not be ascertained as yet how many persons were killed. He said curfew had been imposed in the area and as such it was difficult even to pick up the injured persons from there.

Later in the evening, addressing a gathering of Bishkhudha Biggan Carmachari Union in front of his house, who had come in a procession, the Sheikh said the roads and lanes of "Bangla Desh" were stained with the blood of martyrs for the cause of the people.

Sheikh Mujib told the slogan shouting crowd: "We wanted to resolve the problem peacefully but they want to rule us by force, with the help of weapons." The Awami League leader declared that the people of Bangladesh could not be suppressed by force. People would realise their rights at any cost, he added.

Meanwhile, the fateful talks between President Yahya Khan and the Awami League Chief, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, were resumed at the President's house.

Although the Awami League Chief, talking to newsmen after the meeting, did not say if any formula had been proposed to end the present constitutional deadlock the agreement to hold meeting at advisers' level itself indicates that some ground had been broken at the third round of talks between the President and the Awami League Chief today.

(Compiled by Aasha Meherin Amin)

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

'The Crisis can Only be Solved through Dialogue'



Khurshid Alam, Chairman of Dhaka Stock Exchange responds to The Daily Star questionnaire:

deepen the present political crisis.

With the globalisation and liberalisation of economies, developing countries are in on a marathon race. If we cannot keep pace with other countries, we will be in the back of the race.

I, therefore, suggest that an election may be held as early as may be mutually agreed upon by the parties concerned.

DS: How to ensure an independent election commission? What are the pros and cons of the EC bill passed?

KA: In order to ensure an affirmatively independent Election Commission, adequate structural changes should be made to empower the Commission to enforce the election rules powerfully and vigorously and without any political influence whatsoever.

DS: How formulate a code of conduct for political parties to hold elections? How to ensure

the implementation of such a code?

KA: Any attempt to formulate and impose a code of conduct for the political parties from outside would be counter-productive. The code of conduct as provided in the election rules should be strictly enforced by the Election Commission.

The Election Commission may develop a code of conduct for contesting political parties and candidates through initiation of a dialogue. This will smoothen the election process and help ensure a free and fair election.

DS: Do you think that there should be some sort of political understanding between the ruling party and the opposition to ensure a free and fair election? Is such an understanding possible? If yes, then what should be the next step? If no, why? What are your views on the mechanism under which the next election should be held? What about constitutional amendment?

KA: It is a common practice that there is political understanding between the party in power and the Opposition to the question of holding a free and fair election. It is felt that the party in power should concede to the demand for an election and sit with the

Opposition to reach an understanding to hold a free and fair election and to agree to a mechanism which will provide for such an election.

It is our consensus view that the democratic order, provides for a right climate for progressive development of trade and commerce. Confrontation has no place in the smooth practice of democracy. In the recent times we have observed that the fifty years old confrontation between the PLO and Israel, the imminent trade war between China and the USA gave way to peaceful resolution through dialogue.

All political crisis may be solved through dialogue. Discussion is a synonym for democracy. In fact, discussion is the essential quality of democracy. The present political stalemate can only be eliminated through fruitful political dialogue.

The Efficacy of Bicameralism in Our Situation

by M Taheruddin

IF we look back to the history and practice of democracy in various countries of the world, bicameralism strikes as a necessary adjunct of the democratic process, be it in the olden cradle of parliamentary democracy in the land of Albion or in the federalism of the new world.

It is now felt that not only speed, but also deep consideration of issues, is needed in a situation of crisis. In the wake of impatience to solve the problems of Himalayan magnitude, we could pass from parliamentary to presidential system in the quickest possible political process.

out full consideration of the pros and cons of the unfolding situations. Probably an appropriate forum for dispassionate consideration of the underlying consequences of such moves was not in sight.

Now, think of the situation in the event of a second chamber, constituting proportional representation of the political parties in the parliament and choosing from among persons of eminence in the country. We cannot think of Prof Rehman Sobhan or even Dewan Azraf getting elected in a popular franchise. Nor would they relish much of the political hobnobbing, associated with the process.

Directly elected public representatives at times have to address to the gallery and occasionally do not find it convenient to call a spade a spade in the apprehension of losing public favour.

Under these circumstances, it may be appropriate to make arrangement in the constitution for making provision for a second chamber consisting of 30-50 members with suitable representation from people of eminence and stature principally with advisory authority, not totally blocking the verdict of the popular will, but, at times, inducing a dispassionate discourse on issues of national importance and examining and giving views on the bills passed by the parliament.

Such a chamber may also make scope for representations of various communities, tribes, sects etc, who do not usually get adequate representation in popular franchise due to numerical constraints. In recent time, concerns have been voiced in various circles in respect of inadequate representation of various communities and groups in the national parliament.

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