The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Saturday, March 25, 1995

That Black Black Night

The truth and reality of the March 25 holocaust can be appreciated only when it is understood that the wiping was planned and exerted with a force and fierceness sufficient to rake in success by the end of that night. The ruling junta of Pakistan was so taken up with the idea of not only exterminating all Bengalee activists but also eliminating the words Bengal and Bangla and Bengalee as living meaningful terms. Pakistan as realised by the votes of the Bengalee Muslims was dead by the first shots on that night of unsurpassed satany, killed by the perpetrators of the genocide wrought in the evening.

Perhaps that telling blow took some ten thousand lives - in the span of a mere eight hours. Before Hiroshima man's entire history of warfare and plunder, carnage and mayhem did not know of killing so many unarmed and unresisting civilians so swiftly. And it was also an unparalleled record, never perhaps to be beaten, of a state's own army and de jure leadership killing that very state's own citizens, by the magnitude and the speed of the kill.

March 25, 1971-also stands out as the beginning of one of the world's worst genocides. The inhumanity of the culprits gained immeasurably when, seeing their best bet — the killing blow fail to deliver, they went to make of the following 265 days — each of them — into a March 25.

Whatever posture successive governments in Bangladesh may take as a matter of state-level exigency, the patriotic Bengalee knows his or her mind: we can forgive but never forget. And nobody has asked yet for forgiveness

Out of that black night dawned such a morn as never happened in this ancient people's long story. A heroic people's war ensued on the morrow and born was a sovereign state - first nationstate for the Bengalees or for that matter for any nation in the subcontinent. That wonderful achievement has healed us of one bitterness even as we shall ever be remembering that butchery if only to prove to ourselves our dignity as a people and of our birth.

A Valued Business Link

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and the Chinese National Association of Industry and Commerce (CNAIC) have signed an accord whereby business promotion bodies will be set up in Dhaka and Taipei providing for inter-penetration of the two markets and paving the way for investments from Taiwan — reputed to have the largest investable surplus in the world — to flow into Bangladesh.

For our part, this represents a bold new initiative taken with far-sight and pragmatism to have meaningful economic dealings with an Asian Tiger despite the absence of formal political and diplomatic links with that country. We have had a consistently increasing trade with Taiwan but this has been heavily tilted towards her - our exports to that country being a paltry 9.18 million US dollar in 1993-94 as against our imports estimated at US dollar 196.47 million.

Therefore, high on the list of Bangladesh's agenda is evidently a rapid reduction in this trade gap imbalance with Taiwan. The task could not be left to the persistent marketing trends between the two countries; there had to be an institutional intervention coming from an established mechanism to foster conditions for a balanced interpenetration between the two markets. Given the present size of the Bangladesh market, there may be some scope for exploitation by the Taiwanese but not quite enough to wipe out the huge trade gap we have with them. This gives rise to the need for a massive dose of Taiwanese investment in Bangladesh. Partly with an eye to catering to the demands for goods and services in Taiwan and partly for the sake of mutual advancement through economic partnership. Both the prospects seem to have weighed with Taipei's business leaders who have not failed to appreciate the package of incentives being offered by Bangladesh in the shape of a reduced government role in business and the various other fiscal liberalisation measures adopted by us. The Taiwanese entrepreneurs can also count on an 'exclusive site' we are ready to offer them for building facilities of their choice thereon. Obviously it will be for the government to add the required depth, dimension and reliability to the over-all infrastructure of the country.

Death of a Major Poet

Shakti Chattopadhaya, a leading poet of the Bangla language, died on Thursday at Santiniketan, the capital of Tagoreana, in West Bengal. He was a major poet of our language, bards of all ages considered. And he rose heroically as a deliberate anti-hero, at a time Tagore was long gone and gone too were the post-Tagorean pantheon of Sudhin-Buddadeva and Jibanananda.

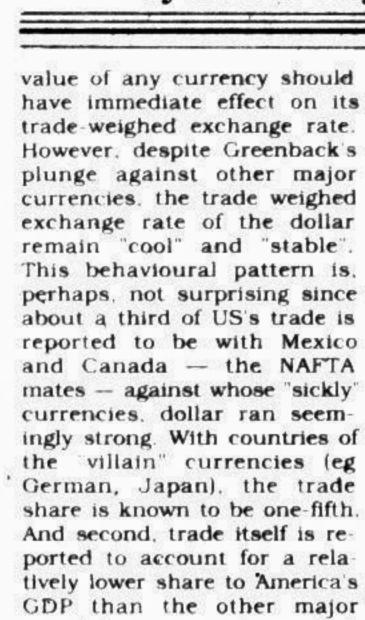
The poetical ambience infested by minors at the end of a time of sureness about the feel and the making of poetry — the pantheon did not substantially move away from the eternal verities of Tagore — the sixties gave birth to an unending spell of groping. And young Shakti, as he is lovingly called and addressed by poetry-lovers of all age-groups, leaped to the leadership of that process of searching the self, in spite of his exulting in self-doubt. Shakti helped end the hold on the literary scene of coarse populist extra-literary imposition mainly come from superficially Marxian positions. If that was a good job, Shakti did not quite arrive in what is a quest for all worthy poets — leaving a stamp, mainly on diction.

We are sure arrangements were not made to preserve what was best in this vastly loved man. Perhaps no documentary has been made to celebrate this very colourful man either. This we say to remind ourselves of our duties to Begum Sufia Kamal, Shamsur Rahman and all our major men and women of arts and letters who are past sixty. Shakti was 61.

Dollar's Dip: Ailing Emperor's ter economic performance. Failing Currency!

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



that Doll: The leader

of the world's reserve

currencies since the World

War II, is gradually moving

towards bad days. The dollar

still continues to be the

linchpin of global finance, the

symbol of US prestige abroad

and the most trusted means of

payment across countries.

Dollars are kept in the

tradiries of many countries as

a shield against financial

insecurity It is, perhaps, most

wanted currency even in rural

towns of poor countries. Quite

obviously, a tumble in the value

of the so valuable dollar could

unnerve global financial

markets and make the holders

of this currency wary and

weary. The current concern all

over the world, however, rings

around the record level dip of

the dollar to Yen 89 (a fall by 6

per cent) and to DM 1.35

(down by 4 per cent). Since

the beginning of 1995, dollars

value eroded by more than a

tenth. According to the cele-

brated news magazine the

TIME, exactly 10 years ago one

dollar used to fetch nearly

three times as much against

the Japanese currency and

twice as much against the

German mark figuring 238 Yen

and 2.94 DM, respectively. Therefore, after recent dip. in-

vestors who bought dollars at

the currency rate of say, 1985 of DM 3.45 and Yen 263

should now be nursing some

stomach-turning losses' while

vacation bound Germans would

celebrate the flood of more

dollars per unit of their re-

in currency markets seemed

to have dashed dollar to rela-

tively lower image as reserve

currency. For example, at the

moment dollar accounts for 60

per cent of world's reserve

holdings as compared to 70

per cent of early eighties and

about three-fourths of the early

would adversely impact the US

economy in several ways. The

US consumers would possibly

be the immediate victims by

being forced to pay more for

their foreign made cameras

and cars - that they are re-

ported to be inclined to buy.

This might heat up inflationary

rate, to some extent. On the

other hand, as dollar tends to

dwindle in value, the US must

be ready to give higher inter-

est rate to attract more money

to pay for its growing deficits.

"That in turn, means jacking

up the cost of loans and mort-

gages and holding the US

economy hostage to the cur-

rency's problems." Few more

comments from Americans

themselves are worth noting.

"The dollar's decline is, per-

haps, the single most danger

ous economic threat we' will

face in the long term because

it puts us at the mercy of other

countries." "It is a national dis-

grace and a sign of losing con-

But Clinton administration

does not appear to be as much

shaken by the recent happen-

ings as others thought it ought

to have been. The relative

calmness could, possibly, be

adduced to two main reasons.

First, the rise or fall in the

trol over the economy".

To begin with, down-turn

In recent years, turbulence

spective local currency.

Reason for the Quake:

Financial analysts are on to

countries, so much so that

Clinton Administration is not

wary of inflationary tendencies

in the economy.

ferret out the causes for the dip in dollar's value. The reasons espoused so far vary from political to diplomatic to the seemingly intractable trade deficit with Japan to the tune of \$65 billion. The following reasons, however seem to hold prominence in explaining the variation in dollar's value: (a) It is argued that the interest rate level in the US seemingly perked to the peak with no obvious sign of a further rise in evidence whereas, Germany stood with potential sign of a rise in interest rate and therefore a dive towards DM leaving behind dollar was not the obvious outcome. In this case, simply the law of demand and supply worked; (b) Diversification of portfolios have become a "favourite" scheme to both American and non-American investors. Therefore, monopoly of the dollar as the foreign currency for invest ment seems to have withered paving ways to new currencies for portfolio investments and (c) The growing liberalization of capital markets in the countries of the world seemed to have contributed to an improvement of fiscal discipline and thus making their respective currencies more attractive alternatives than anything in the past

Beside the above mentioned causes, America's \$50 billion plan to help Mexico out of the current rots is also adduced to have exacerbated dollar's fall. It is reasoned that with that help going to Mexico, America's budget deficit would grow with an enlargement of the American demand in the global capital market. Given that American's interest rate is at the pack, noted earlier, investors moved to demand other curr-

encies like DM and Yen. It should not, however, be taken for granted that the dol-

lar would not stage a rise back from the dip. In fact, it has already started doing so. The fact that currencies overshoot in both direction is well established and reasonably well understood. Such is the foreign exchange market. Dollar's Dooms Day?

By and large it can reasonably be argued that the Coldwar years of dollar's dominance in international finance seems no more working. With the end of the Cold War, Japan and Germany are also considered near 'safe havens." The present global system with its serious assault on restrictive policies is, perhaps, putting dollar in a relatively shattered status since other countries are marching ahead with bet

Many countries are also switching over to DM or Yen as reserve currency. For example Indonesia is reported to have 40 per cent of its reserve as Yen and the rest in dollar. Other South and South East. Asian countries are also reported to follow the suit. The lesson that American policy makers ought to learn is that, according to our analyst, gone are the days when US could survive with big domestic policy errors. Now is a time when the globalization network made the whole world sensitive to small error committed in the US. If the US continues to face growing budget deficits in coming years, then the rate of inflation and the decay in its currency would be manifold and dangerous too.

But for the moment, dollar needs to stand straight because there is not yet any substitute of dollar as reserve money. Japanese and German current account surpluses are not considered enough to provide the required amount of Yen and Marks to assure a solution to the world liquidity problem. For both America's and the world's interest. America should reduce its overconsumption curtailing budget deficit. Only fiscal balance can help dollar to move ahead.

Looking Back at March towards Independence

March 25, '95

Earlier in the day, in a statement Sheikh Mujibur Rahman reiterated that no power on earth could frustrate the just and legitimate demands of the 75 million people of Bangladesh.

Addressing a number of processions which marched upto his residence in Dhanmondi, he sternly warned against conspirators who were trying to sabotage the united movement of the Bengalee people and asked them 'not to play with fire. This he said, would lead to dire consequences for the country

Sheikh Mujib asserted that Bengalees would either live as free citizens of the country or die, but would never bow down to the unholy ruling clique.

Meanwhile the staff and employees of the Hotel Intercontinental (now Sheraton) Ceremoniously hoisted a bigger Joy Bangla flag replacing the smaller one at the main mast. Reports said that another curfew had been imposed in

Rangpur for 14 hours beginning from 5 pm. On the same day. Sheikh Mujib called for a general strike throughout Bangladesh on March 27th as a mark of protest against heavy firing upon the civilian population in Saidpur,

Rangpur and Joydevpur. He declared that such atrocities and killing of unarmed people would not go unchallenged.

He added that all this had happened while the president was in Dacca for the declared purpose of resolving politically the grave crisis facing the country. "I urge him to order immediate cessation of such military operations," he said.

Sheikh Mujib gave other speeches in various parts of the city. Addressing a huge procession from Rayer-Bazar area he said. "If some of us have to die again for our rights, this will be the last time.

In a press statement on the same day. Sheikh Mujib expressed concern over the delay in resolving the crisis politically especially when the president Yahya Khan had indicated in talks with the Awami League that a political solution was possible.

Compiled by Aasha Mehreen Amin

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

'If there is Will, there Must be Initiative to Resolve the Crisis through Dialogue"

The Daily Star (DS): What do you think are the reasons for the present political stalemate? What is the way out? Please elaborate your views on

what the next step should be. Amir-ul Islam (AI): There is: a) An evident lack of initiative by the main actor in the situation namely the Prime Minister in resolving the problem; b) Lack of care for the people's opinion, she being totally nonresponsive to public opinion: c) Lack of appreciation that democracy can only be run through effective consultation with the Opposition; d) Lack of understanding about the role of electioneering ground rules which ought to be acceptable to all major political parties and above all the people, no that the people can exercise their sovereign power in a free and fair manner.

In view of the Prime Minister's statement on December 29th, apparently there seems to exist a basis for the matching of the minds. Assuming that there is political will, the present stalemate can be re-

solved through dialogue. The details as well as the constitutional and legal modalities and the time frame may be worked out through discussions and with expert help. Next step for the Prime Minister ought to be to initiate a dialogue with the leader of the Opposition clearly stating that she needs to find out a solution to the present situation with the help of the Opposition

DS: Everybody is talking about elections, but when should it be held -within the next few months, or later in the year or at its scheduled time early next year? Suggest measures to be taken for the timing of your choice.

Al: If the negotiated settlement can bring about a solution without having to amend the Constitution, then the Parliament can be dissolved with an agreed schedule for an early

mid-term election. If on the other hand no solution can be reached without having to change the Constitution, then a formula must also be thought out as to how the full House can again reassem ble in order to effect such amendment though this may entail a laboured parliamentary engineering to put it together again, but it is not impossible once there is political will and a meeting of the minds. If a political settlement is reached in a package form the members resigned can be brought back even through uncontested by-elections as

may be agreed beforehand. DS: How to ensure an independent election commission? What are the pros and cons of the EC bill passed recently?

Al: In order to have an independent Election Commission, there is no dearth of power under the Constitution and the law, though I agree that the law may further be improved, but again the question is does the Election Commission want to be independent? Is the Commission constituted by persons who have commitment for independent election or are they committed to further reward in the form of post and promotion as had been the case in the past by making one the vice-president and another chairman of the Press Council and now we hear the talk about promoting the present CEC to become the judge of the Appellate Division, though our Constitution clearly prohibits such appointment under

article 118(3) (a). Similarly, there is a clear Interview with Barrister Amir-ul Islam

by Lamis Hossain

bar for sitting or a retired judge to be appointed to any post or office which is not purely judicial or quasi-judicial (article 99).

Besides, one does not have to be a judge in order to be independent. Neither Mr Seeshan of India or Mr de Silva of Sri Lanka are judges. They are from administration back ground yet they have shown to the world what power and respect the CEC may command. The entire administration shows allegiance to his order.

Our Constitution has given all the powers to the Chief Election Commissioner and further ordained that "The Election Commission shall be independent in the exercise of its function." (Article 118(1)4) and that "it shall be the duty of all executive authorities to assist the Election Commission in the discharge of its functions". (Art. 126).

Indian CEC Mr Seeshan recently postponed the election in Bihar as the pared that there is no environment for conducting a free and fair election but our CEC could not make such moves in Magura nor could cancel the election in Mirpur.

The CEC has not implemented its legal mandate and thus has already violated the law and not only that he violated the clear mandate of the law, but also allowed the recent bi-election to be held without such enquiry committee having been constituted, nor did he monitor the election, which was his primary function.

As a result the electorate has been victim of violence, threat and coercion, even resulting in deaths on the polling day. Who is to answer to this? Do we have any accountability for the violation of our Constitution and the law, thus resulting in deterioration and de-

struction of our institution? DS: How to formulate a Code of Conduct for political parties to hold elections? And how to ensure implementation

of such a code? AI: The Code of Conduct for political parties may be done through discussion's and negotiations and further the EC itself could suggest such codes which may be publicised through the media. The political parties may be asked whether they would like to comply or not. Once they make a declaration of adherence to such code, it should be deemed as becoming part of the law creating obligations to perform and failure to perform them should be a punishable offence.

DS: What are your views on the need for a computerised voter's list and identity cards? Can we ensure fair elections without them? If we want them, then what should be the time for the elections?

Al: Computer voter's list and ID cards are no doubt the welcome moves, but most important is updating of the list In order to perfect the new system it may need one or two elections to be held before the perfection can be achieved. Hence in the absence of ID cards, voters with alternative should not be denied the vote. Strict compulsive requirement for ID cards could initially be counter-productive

In deciding the time for bolding election the legal and political requirement should get preference to the techno

logical need for an ID card. If needed the law can be relaxed on this. DS: We hear a lot about black money being a factor in the next election. What are

your suggestions to make election funding transparent and accountable? AI: I would strongly recommend for political parties to

have grant from the national budget proportionate to the votes secured in the election (requiring minimum number of votes for the recognition of a party), and strict auditing of party funds. Without having to disclose the source, the fund must be transparent. There must be accountability. Ultimately it is the party which helps build the democratic institution. Unless there is honesty and transparency in the running of the party fund there cannot be honesty and transparency in running the affairs of the state: because running of the state is almost a mirror image of the way the party is run in a democratic society. I also recommend for restrictions and regulations for the publicity materials. For instance in Sri Lanka there is a ban on postering, writing on the wall or display of any signs during the election campaign.

Election campaigns are

done through public meetings, electronic media and the press. Though all powers belong to the people, the elected representatives and particularly the parties become all powerful in the name of the people. At least the last 72 hours before the poll people should be made free from the party presence or presence of campaigning or propaganda. Streets and premises must be clean — the localities must be free from sound of microphone, meetings and rallies and visits by any party worker or candidate, so that at least for those hours people could feel that they are their own masters. Like the jurors they need a peaceful room for themselves - some quiet hours to evaluate the merits of the parties and their candidates. This will also reduce the expenses and help cool off the steam generated through the campaign period. Campaign period ought not to exceed more than three weeks.

D8: What are your views on the mechanism under which the next elections should be held? What about constitutional amendments?

Al: In view of the loss of credibility of our election process held under the administration and executive headed by a party leader, there is overwhelming public opinion backed by all opposition par ties for a neutral caretaker government during the election period. I would strongly recommend for such a caretaker government. I would have been more inclined for a constitutional amendment in order to give it an institutional shape, but since the present state of the parliament does not hold out any immediate promise for amendment to the Constitution, attempt can also be made by developing and improving the Ninian formula in order to make it more acceptable to the Opposition It is important, however, to remind the government as well as the Opposition that it is not possible to have a non party non elected neutral caretaker government whether under



the President or under a Prime Minister without amending the Constitution. Mr Justice Shahabuddin's appointment as the President was possible by first making him the vice president followed by the resignation of General Ershad allowable under the Presidential form which is not possible under the present dispensation after the 12th amendment. The political parties irrespective of their other differences are committed to the Constitution one would hope. It cannot be expected from them to recommend violation of the Constitution as was done by the military generals as usurpers and tried to legitimise their unconstitutional action by 5th and 7th amendments. In my view, 5th and 7th amendments are themselves anti-constitutional. Repetition of any such move cannot be supported by any political party or a citizen having faith in the Constitution which "we the people of Bangladesh" have given ourselves after having "won a historic struggle for national liberation," (preamble of Constitution) constitution certainly can be amended but it cannot be violated as it is the "sacred duty of every citizen, "to safeguard, protect and defend the constitution," (preamble)

DS: Do you think that there should be some sort of political understanding between the ruling party and the opposition to ensure free and fair election? Is such an understanding possible? If yes, then what should the next step be? If not, why not?

Al: Understanding between the ruling party and the opposition party is incumbent, and I believe this understanding in not only possible, but it is a pre-condition for running a meaningful democracy.

After all, the government has to be run for the benefit of the people and on their behalf and for their interest. It is not enough to be clever, the government must also be wise to be able to make complex is sues simpler and not make

simple issues more complex. Therefore, the next step ought to be for the Prime Minister to make a commitment to the nation that she is going to resolve the present political impasse with the help of the Opposition and in consultation with them and make a sincere effort to invite the Opposition tor a meaningful dialogue, for holding a tree and fair election so that people can exercise their free choice, without arrytear or influence, and being free from any threat or coer cion of any nature

Parties should not hold the people who are the real and uitimate sovereign as hostage too long it is after all the people to whom power belongs and the sovereign will is the sovereign himself', as was said by American Federalist James Wilson there can be no exer cise of sovereignty but by their suffrage which are their own will

Alternate to hartal

Sir. In a modern civilised and democratic world of intel lectuals, great statesmen, parliamentarians and highly educated political leaders discuss and resolve in a systematic, lawful and peaceful manner various national and international problems and difficulties when raised in the house of the representatives of the people. It is very unfortunate and painful that hartal, strike. road blockade and street agitation etc have become a common phenomenon in our country at the cost of untold sufferings of the people.

We suggest that our intellectuals, political thinkers and leaders may kindly find out some alternatives to frequent hartal and strike to register their grievances, compel the government to accept their legitimate demands and to save the people from the catastrophic socio-economic and political hardships and

We witness that whenever any strike or hartal is observed in the country our political leaders do not have to undergo any sort of suffering nor they lose anything, but it is the members of the public who suffer tremendously.

We believe that no political movement or demand can gain momentum if the political leaders do not share the difficulties, sufferings and hard ships equally with the people. We therefore suggest that

instead of calling for frequent hartal or strike and road blockade for six, twelve, twenty-four, forty-eight or seventy-two hours our political leaders may kindly observe "Bhookh Hartal' (fasting) for different periods as the situation may demand, and invite their loyal supporters to join. In this connection they may kindly erect big 'shamianas' use public address system, assemble as many people as they can, prove their political

demands as genuine in theory as well in practice and thus in a pristine and peaceful manner win the sympathy and support of the vast majority of the country.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

museum.

abroad.

'Bangabandhu

Museum" Sir. This refers to a letter, published in your daily a few days ago, titled "Bangabandhu Museum." The writer of that letter requested the authorities to withdraw the 'ticket system' at the entrance of the

In this connection I want to inform that the selling of tickets at any museum gate to enter into it is a practised system all over the world. For instance, at the Country House of William Shakespeare (at Stratford-Upon-Avon), which is also a museum, I saw the ticket system in vogue at the enalso trance. And 'Anandabhaban', which is a country house of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the great Indian leader at Allahabad in UP. And I also saw this 'ticket system' at many museums at home and

So, I humbly want to tell that there is nothing wrong or shameful in this 'ticket system' at Bangabandhu Museum. Nipa Sharmeen Talaimari. Rajshahi

> **ERRATUM** A review of the book "The

Hindu Phenomenon" by Girtlal Jain was published yesterday on page 12 in the Magazine section of this paper where the name of the reviewer, Jim Novak was inadvertently dropped. We apologise to our readers and to Mr Novak for this error. Mr Novak is a senior Fulbright Scholar. now doing research in Bangladesh.