

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.

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.

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 nation-state for the Bengalees or for that matter for any nation in the subcontinent.

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.

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 inter-penetration between the two markets.

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Death of a Major Poet

Shakti Chattopadhyaya, 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 Jibananda.

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.

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 Failing Currency!

On the surface it appears that Dollar — 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.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



value of any currency should have immediate effect on its trade-weighted exchange rate. However, despite Greenback's plunge against other major currencies, the trade-weighted exchange rate of the dollar remains 'cool' and 'stable'.

It should not, however, be taken for granted that the dollar would not stage a rise back from the dip. In fact, it has already started doing so. The fact that currencies overshoot in both directions is well established and reasonably well understood. Such is the foreign exchange market.

Dollar's Doms Day?

By and large it can reasonably be argued that the Cold-war 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'.

Reason for the Quake:

Financial analysts are to 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.

Beside the above mentioned causes, America's \$50 billion plan to help Mexico out of the current riots is also adduced to have exacerbated dollar's fall.

To the Editor...

Alternate to hartal

Sir, In a modern civilised and democratic world of intellectuals, 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.

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 museum.

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.

ERRATUM

A review of the book 'The Hindu Phenomenon' by Girtal 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.

Looking Back at March towards Independence

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.

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'

Interview with Barrister Amir-ul Islam

by Lamis Hossain



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 non-responsive 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.

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

AI: 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).

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

AI: 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.

Similarly, there is a clear logical need for an ID card. If needed the law can be relaxed on this.

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 background yet they have shown to the world what power and respect the CEC may command. The entire administration shows allegiance to his order.

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 destruction of our institution?

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

AI: 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 parties 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 Ninan 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

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 posting, 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.

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

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Parties should not hold the people who are the real and ultimate 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 exercise of sovereignty but by their suffrage which are their own will.