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Closed Door Opens Slightly

Prime minister's renewed offer of talks, and Sheikh Hasina's not rejecting it right away, give us some reasons to hope that the door of talks, closed for so long, may at last open a bit. It is still very much shut. From the latest proposal by the Speaker it appears that some people are at least fiddling with the locks and the bolts for its possible opening. Viewed from the opposition side there is really nothing new in what the PM has said last Tuesday. Her offer for talks, even directly with AL Chief, if necessary, is not new. What agitates their mind is the fact that Begum Zia remains vague and unspecified in her offer of talks. "We must know what we are going to talk about before, agreeing to sit for it" is the most common reply. While there is some merit in this position, it must be remembered that it is only one side of the facts. The other side is that the PM has renewed her offer, and that by itself constitutes a new development.

It is our view that the opposition should, instead of trivialising the offer, respond by saying that it is also ready for talks and select its own team for pre- talks negotiations. This team can spell out the way as to how the talks should proceed. The ruling party will then be obliged to set up a similar team, and thus a process of clarifying the issues will start. The opposition is correct in assessing that there is some link between the present initiative and the forthcoming Paris Consortium. The government would like to be able to say to the donors that it has taken a new initiative to break the political deadlock. The opposition should take full advantage of this opportunity, not by a stand-off, but by making offers that the ruling party will find difficult to refuse without appearing inflexible. Both nationally and internationally it is now the opposition that appears inflexible. If that impression continues BNP will have a field day in convincing critics that its repeated attempts to negotiate failed only because the other side wants all-or-nothing.

We totally disagree with the PM when she says that the country is functioning normally, and that the opposition's agitation and its en masse resignation of MPs have had no impact on the country. Such a mind-set is adding to the problem, and hampering its solution. There is a tremendous sense of frustration and despondency among the people. There is a corrosion of faith in our own ability to govern sensibly. What can be more tragic than the fact that our elected PM has failed to perceive it.

Last four years of our democratic experiment, and the last one year of opposition's agitation should convince both sides that neither can have it its own way. Only a negotiated solution can show the way ahead. And negotiations must mean "Give and Take". Please understand it as a fundamental truth in politics and free the nation from the stranglehold of ego-contest.

SSC Exam Hiccup

The SSC examinations began yesterday with several hundred students failing to appear in these because they didn't have any admit cards. Another 15000 dubiously registered students were not to be admitted to the examinations Maximum number of such candidates are from the Jessore Board but there are some from the Dhaka Board as well. Students having done their part of the job flawlessly surely have a case against the school authority and the board concerned. Aggrieved students staged demonstrations, gheraoed the local thana nirbahi offices and even went for litigation against the concerned board's chairman and controller.

If these were just isolated cases coming up inadvertently, there would have been at least some consolation. But these were apparently deliberately done by some teachers in collusion with a few dishonest employees of the board. Reportedly, the headmaster of one school in Kishoregani fled. According to the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) there, the candidates of the school submitted their forms on time but the headmaster did not send those to the Dhaka Education Board.

Sadly, this has not been the only dishonest means adopted to launder ineligible candidates, in fact all kinds of duplication, and submission of false names and dates of birth have also been restored to. Obviously for a hefty sum of profit beyond the fees prescribed by the board. Of the 15,000 students who have got their registration cancelled at the last moment, many might fall in this category. It is good news that the education boards have become alive, even though belatedly, to this growing problem. The boards should clean up their own houses and develop some sort of mechanism to monitor the selection tests held in every school for sending candidates to the examination centres. On the punitive side, any teacher or board employee found guilty of manipulation with students' records should be given deterrent punishment.

Matter of Right

A report in a vernacular daily has it to the effect that some anti-liberation forces have successfully resisted the holding of a public reception for poet Shamsur Rahman in Sylhet. They attacked the meeting of the preparatory committee on the eve of the reception and called a dawn-to-dusk hartal in Sylhet on Thursday so that the event could not take place. They managed to do what they wanted.

Now the question is: why are they opposed to someone whom the whole nation has accepted as our prime poet? It is the poet's belief in secularism and his liberal attitude to life that have angered them. If some people thought the poet did not deserve such honour, they could avoid the function or even express their sentiments through writings. But who has given them the right to deny others the satisfaction of arranging reception for a poet?

After all the organisers of the event did not go to hurt anyone's feeling by according reception to a poet. So why are these excesses? The administration cannot turn a blind eye to these anymore. As in politics so also in matters cultural, absence of tolerance by any quarter is an impingement on the fundamental rights of others.

Democracy, Good Governance and Development in the post-Cold War Era

HAT Neville Chamberlain said about the outcome of armed conflicts is equally true about the Cold War ; "In war whichever side may call itself the victor, there are no winners, but all are losers". The euphoria on the victory of liberal democracy over the command economies is largely misplaced. There is no peace dividend. The world is nowhere near the end of convulsions and turbulences which made this century "one of the meanest, cruelest and bloodiest in human history." The same forces which shattered the dream for a Marxist never never-land have also rendered capitalism obsolescent Unwittingly the world has already stumbled into the postcapitalist era. The end of the cold war is surely not the "End of History."

The quest for social justice

and equitable order for the poor and deprived remains as elusive as ever. There are more poor people today than the total world population in the mid-nineteenth century when Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto. There are more hungry people now than ever. The world is witnessing a colossal wastage of human resources. Unacceptable levels of joblessness are undermining the soeial and political fabrics not only in developing countries but also in affluent societies. The rate of unemployment in developing countries like Bangladesh (about 37 per 'cent) far exceeds the catastrophic heights of joblessness during the Great Depression (about 18.2 per cent in the USA). In western Europe alone, more than 20 million workers are now idle; in the USA 8.9 million. The collapse of communism does not mean that there will be no new ideology to rally the deprived, the disadvantaged and the hungry. In the Cold War era, the threat of extremism came from mainly one ideology in the left. Liberal democracy today is likely to be besieged by a plethora of ex tremist ideologies from both the right and left of the mainstream. The disenchantment with representative institutions which gave birth to partitocrazia (the dictatorship of established parties) and the cartel of politicians and lobbyists against voters and taxpay ers is widespread in both afflu-

ent and developing societies. The pangs and trauma of poverty in the post capitalist society are much more poignant and agonising than ever. For the poor, it is excruciatingly painful to reconcile with the shame of stark deprivation in a world basking in glittering abundance and extraordinary potentialities. The problems of poverty, however, do not remain confined to the poor themselves or the societies in which they live. As the Human Development Report 1993 rightly stressed: The real threat in the next few

decades is that global poverty ARTY split, the country ARTY split, the country is waiting anxiously for Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's next move as the Congress president. He is in the sort of trouble that makes Benazir Bhutto's job look easy by comparison. She has already faced the split in her Pakistan People's Party. Her brother. Murtaza, has constituted a parallel PPP but has not set the Sindh to fire. Rao is yet in the midst of challenge to Congress.

Arjun Singh, once his number two, does not give the impression of a person who has reconciled to the expulsion from the party. He claims to be a member of the Congress parliamentary party and acts every inch a real Congressman. The party flag flies at the crowded rallies he addresses and local Congressmen assemble to hear him. He has not floated a new Congress party. Nor does he show any intention to do so. But he behaves like a shepperd

who is sure of his flock. Still more embarrassing for Rao is ND Tewari, the seniormost Congress leader in the country's largest state. Uttar Pradesh. He has resigned from all offices of the party but not from the party. He has also made Rao sit on pins and needles by joining hands with Arjun Singh openly. He is defying Rao on the one hand and insisting on Arjun Singh's return to Congress on the other. And he is getting subdued, solid support.

Rao's usual response not to recognise a problem is too casual for the incipient revolt that is spreading in Congress.

will begin to travel without passport, in many unpleasant forms : drugs, diseases, terrorism, migration. Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere."

Poverty is both a consequence as well as a cause of environmental degradation. In the context of struggle for survival. immediate requirements of the poor tend to overshadow any concern for the environmental future. The pressures of poverty and the consequential environmental stresses have resulted in the rising incidence of disasters and multiplication of the number of victims. As the Brundtland Commission rightly pointed out "Societies have faced such pressures in the past and as many desolate ruins remind us, sometimes succumb to them. But generally these pressures are local. Today the scale of our intervention in nature is increasing and the physical effects of our decision will spill across national frontiers". However, the loud emergencies of the environment such as global warming and ozone depletion should not detract our attention from the silent emergencies of poverty (such as water polluby M Saifur Rahman

that created the widening gap between the affluent and developing societies did not originate in the Third World. They are the products of industrial societies Underdevelopment is not an original state, it was created by the developed countries them-

The process of interaction between developing and affluent societies has often been oversimplified. The widening gap between these societies was not produced by economic exploitation of imperial powers alone. The disequilibrium of underdevelopment arose mainly from the incomplete transfer of technology of the North to the South. While the North readily sold the knowhow as well as the medicines for reducing death rate, it did not transfer the technology for raising the productivity of industry and agriculture which was essential for supporting the increased population during the demographic transition. Environmental problems originated with the profligate use of natural resources by the developed countries. Because of the disequilibrium in the

low income countries received only 59 per cent of official aid. the rest went to countries who do not deserve aid on economic considerations alone Secondly, the most generous per capita allocation of aid does not hecessarily go to the poorest countries. For example, per capita aid to Bangladesh in 1988 was \$14 whereas per capita aid to Israel was \$282, to Jordan \$100 and to Egypt \$30 Thirdly, a substantial part of aid is used by donor countries for promoting their commercial and strategic interest. Tied aid, which constitutes approximately two thirds of all bilateral assistance, forces the recipient to buy goods and services from donor countries at a non-competitive price. Despite these limitations, aid has played a seminal role in various sectors. For example economic assistance in Bangladesh has succeeded in promoting a highly successful population planning programme, in accelerating agricultural production, in construction of orgently needed rural infrastructure and in alleviation of poverty. What is

prises, the process of development inevitably involves the ordeal of undoing what has been laboriously done in the past : decrease regulation, privatize the public sector enterprises, and reduce the size of the government. A small government, however, does not necessarily imply a weak government. The developing countries need more governance, not less. The choice before them is between a big but ineffective government and a lean but strong government that can and does govern. Market economy cannot work in an institutional vacuum. It presupposes a strong government that can ensure the rule of law. accountability. transparency and predictability in its day to day operations. Effective governance is unquestionably a necessary condition for sustaining economic growth. However, the role of the state cannot be curtailed overnight. It has to be done through the democratic process. As the recent elections in India demonstrate that the voters do often prefer big and paternalistic government to lean and efficient govern-

Good governance, however,

Good governance, however, cannot be imposed from above. There is no single recipe for good governance. The erosion of public confidence in the governmental system is not unique to developing countries, it is equally true about affluent societies who are also trying to reinvent the government. Good governance, emerges through a process of trial and error.

tion, land degradation and en-

vironmental diseases). On balance the recent shifts in the post-capitalist society are not wholly unfavourable to developing countries. Some of these changes have actually opened new windows of opportunities for economic transformation. Historically countries developed if they possessed more natural resources, were initially rich and enjoyed the advantages of having higher capital per head as well as superior technology and skills. With globalization and emergence of what Drucker describes Knowledge Society", the modernisation of a developing society is now feasible mainly on the basis of education and skills of the labour force There are now real opportunities of leap-frogging the stages of development in the Third World have now recognized the futility of resisting the process of integration with the global economy. This realization has façilitated şignificant structural reforms which have dramatically enhanced the efficience and competitiveness of their economies. Finally, the disintegration, of command economies has exposed the perversities and hollowness of big government. The costs of bureaucratic failures have been minimized and a new stage has been set for the flowering of

the individual initiative. Despite these promising changes, the odds of economic development should not be underestimated. The forces

world economic order, the rich in the affluent societies is getting richer whereas the absolute number of the poor in the developing countries is

swelling. It is highly unlikely that most of the developing countries will be able to raise the resources for providing! and maintaining minimum physical and social infrastructure for sustainable development. To contain population growth and provide minimum health care lacilities, expenditure on health alone in developing countries requires to be raised by four times of the current expenditure. Likewise, an enormous investment needed to provide minimum physical infrastructure. The reduction of concessional aid flow from the affluent societies to developing countries will therefore, be a serious have to

their growth. Of late, there has been considerable revisionism on the role of foreign aid Undeniably, there are many instances of inefficient utilization of external assistance. Aid faligue in the affluent societies is, therefore, natural, However, suboptimal use of aid is not merely attributable to incapacity and rent-seeking in the recipient countries but the compulsions of the donors themselves have played their part. Aid is still scarred in many ways by the political realities of the cold war as well as the internal politics of the donors. First, political considerations divert aid to middle and high income countries. In 1988,

needed to be done is to repli cate the areas where success has been achieved rather than using aid as an instrument of political manipulation. The long-term political and social benefits are likely to be much more than short-term financial

Of course, aid by itself can

never be a sufficient condition for development. The impetus for growth must come from within. Fascinated by the initial successes of command economies and alarmed by widespread market failures. the Governments in developing countries opted for big government with an overwhelming concentration of power in the hands of central government and an elaborate network of prohibitions, rules and regulations. Covernment forgot that they were supposed to manage the country's business and not the businesses of the country. The resultant massive government failure in developing countries vindicated the dire warning of the fourteenth Muslim philosopher Ibn Khaldun: "Commercial activity on the part of the rulers is harmful to his subjects and ruinous to tax revenue." For example, in Bangladesh, direct losses of the parastatals are over one per cent of the GDP per annum. The unsatisfactory performance of the monopolistic public utilities has stifled

the potentialities of growth. Because of ever-increasing bureaucratic failures and the appalling inefficiencies and losses of state-owned enter-

cannot be imposed from above. There is no single recipe for good governance. The erosion of public confidence in the governmental system is not unique to developing countries, it is equally true about aifluent societies who are also trying to reinvent the government. Good governance emerges through a process of trial and error. Given the immense diversity of political forms, each society must be allowed to find its own way to reconcile conflicting interest groups and weave them into a cohesive organization.

Historical experience indicates that democratic governments tend to be more responsive to the needs of the people. Democracy is not. however, a one shot affair. It is not a matter of single decision or a hurriedly arranged election. It is a long and arduous process. Constant renewal of democratic values is needed to ensure that levers of power are not usurped by vested interest groups. Democracy allows maximum influence of the people on the decisions that affect their lives. However, even democratic institutions in nation-states have turned out to be too big for the small. There are always social groups who are excluded wholly or partially from the polity: the very young, the very old, the disabled and women with heavy domestic commitments. For millions of underdogs all over the world, political participation is a luxury. Aftirmative ac tions are needed to reduce the

discriminations against the socially disadvantaged. Legal systems need to be modernised with changing socioeconomic circumstances, bureaucratic constraints need to be reduced and discriminatory social norms and practices must be discouraged. Even this is not sufficient. The disadvantaged groups will have to be empowered through both formal and informal education. and barriers to women's participation in the development process needs to be removed. Bangladesh has, therefore, placed maximum emphasis on education for women and children. A programme for Food for Education at primary stage and stipend for female children at secondary stage has been introduced to discourage dropout rates. There is abundant empirical evidence to suggest that when the window of opportunity is opened to them the poor are indeed efficient users of resource

Another precondition of good governance through democratic process is deientralization of power, First. more authority needs to be transferred from capital cities to local governments in regions, towns and villages. Secondly, people's organizations and non-government organization (NGO) can play a significant role in empowering the poor. Innovative organisations in Bangladesh such as the Grameen Bank and the BRAC and a number of others have blazed the trail of flex merid ods of self help of the sines roots level. However, Man can at best supplement the government, they can never be substitutes of government. The teal challenge of good governance is, therefore, to blend an effective and compassionate national government with local governments, people's organisations. NGOs and other finde pendent give societies. This is not easy to achieve. It will have to be a long-drawn process of change feel by promite

Ultimately, good governance will have to be nourished and sustained by the people themselves. At this crucial juncture of history, patriotism is not enough. Patriotism is the willingness to die for one's own country, What we need now is citizenship. It means the willingness to live for one's country

Without citizenship there cannot be that responsible commitment which in the last analysis holds together the body politic. Citizenship means an active commitment to one's community, to one's country as well as to the world at large, Such citizens will not be the passive recipients of change. They will shape their own future in the light of their vision.

The above write-up is based on a presentation by M Saifur Rahman, Minister of Finance at Overseas Development Institute in London yesterday.

The Indian Political Scene

Still Rao has to find a way to save Congress from splitting. The scene may look quiet but turmoil is building up. Before long some one will bell the cat. No amount of smiling blandness will smother the cries for improving Congress.

He does not want a tall person like Tewari to quit. Nor does he like the challenge thrown to him go unanswered. Hé will require some thoughtful thuggery. He cannot afford to be Mr Nice to Tewari and Mr Nasty to Arjun Singh. The first has been careful not to attack Rao by name as the second did. Otherwise, there is no difference between the two in running down the Congress government or the party appara-

Congress reverses in state elections have weakened Rao. He has begun to realise his limitations. And he has learnt to adjust. He did not want J B Patnaik to be Orissa's chief minister and told Congress observer Pranab Mukherjee to have anyone except Patnaik. But the pro-Patnaik 50-member phalanx made Mukherjee relent. Similarly, left to Rao. he would not have allowed K Karunakaran to step down from the Kerala chief ministership. But when the prime minister realised that the choice was between the Congress-led coalition and no coalition, he compromised.

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No amount of smiling blandness will smother the cries for improving Congress. Rao has to do something to recover his and the party's image between now and the parliamentary election in mid-1996.

Rao is building bridges with some of non-Congress leaders for adjustment of seats. He met

Subramaniam Swamy, who has got the permission to prosecute Jayalalitha. Even the case can be kept hanging.

Apparently, Rao does not want to have a formal alliance with the Janata Dal. This would have given Congress a new image - and strength. The impediment seems to be V P

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, N T Rama Rao, recently. He has already met UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav. And he is also in touch with Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav. He has not yet discussed with them the elections but the meetings are an effort to smoothen the ground.

The permission to prosecute Tamil Nadu chief minister J Javalalitha, cleared with Rao, is a sword placed on her head so that she sees "the advantage" of an alliance with Congress for the parliamentary polls. Both were allies in the last elections. After all, it is Rao who has granted the cabi-

net minister status to

Singh who, even after quitting parliament, has emerged a factor following Laloo's victory in Bihar. It is V P Singh's personal appeal to the backwards and the Muslims that has tilted the balance in favour of the Janata Dal. The leadership question does not have to be settled before the elections. Rao will have to make up his

mind quickly. The CPI (M), after its deliberations at Chandigarh, is keen on getting Janata Dal and some provincial leaders like Mulayam Singh and N T Rama Rao on the same platform so as the place before voters an alternative to Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party. The

communists are averse to hav ing any truck with Congress. The two were together till 1977 but gone apart since. particularly from 1991, because of economic reforms which are seen anti-people. Time alone will tell whether the communists succeed in their effort or whether Rao will win over some state leaders and partly Janata Dal and its breakaway group, the Samta Party.

The problem with the third

alternative is its uncertain future. Twice before it has been tried, first in 1977 and then in 1989. Both times it collapsed following personal ambitions and group rivalries. The electorate may be chary of putting its faith again on a combination that comes into being to fill the vacuum for the time being. Human rights organisations activists and the student com binations can provide a platform, with which some likeminded political parties can

Despite the rhetoric, the BJP has not said anything at its Goa meeting which could give faith to the minorities. A commitment to secularism is not mere part of tacticts. It must reflect in its pronouncement and action. Even the advice the party gave to Bal Thackery, the Shiv Sena chief, was that he should be more tactful. In other words, he should not have directly threatened to exterminate a minority when he received a personal threat but should have couched his warning in different language.

The very growth of the BJP is dependent on polarisation; how can it stop playing the Hindu card? In fact, it weakens itself when it says that it adheres to the principles of secularism. Its strength is Hindu chauvinism; it may dilute that if it also tries to ride the boat of secularism at the

same time. Congress ire over Bal Thackery's recent observations

is for effect alone. He has said and done worse things before. The then Congress governments both at Bombay and in New Delhi did not lift a finger against him. I recall when some of us, senior journalists, met Prime Minister Rao during the Bombay riots two years ago to request him to take action against the Shiv Sena chief, his reply was that Thackery was "a political person" and had to be treated accordingly.

Some action should have been taken against him then but I hope that Congress now fights him politically. The party was responsible for Bhindranwale in Punjab and let it not make Bal Thakery into, one. Wherever violence has surfaced, it is due to government's preference for police to contact in the field Suppression has supplanted

sagacity. Nervous as Congress is it can commit any mistake. This will make the political scene only more dismal. I fear that some party or some region may set into motion a process that may be too parochial and too communal. Since the parliamentary elections are only one year away, every posture and every pressure will be considered legitimate. Congress will be as guilty as any other all-India or the state political party

Indeed, the landscape will be further confused and jagged due to lack of viable, credible alternative at the Centre. In fact, the crisis is that of lack of faith in any political formation. Voters are going over the motion but most of the political parties are not to their liking because they have seen them either not performing or misperforming. The electorate is sceptical about them. Its cynicism has become stronger and more corrosive.

With parties working at cross purposes, the suspicion against politicians is going to deepen. Their irrelevance will be increasingly discussed and felt. It looks as if India is in for a long phase of political instability. In any case, political scene has been patchy for many years. The state elections have made it still more uneven. The parliamentary polls may will bring no improvement.

Fix the status of BAI

Sir, During the late seventies, the then Directorate of Agriculture (Research and Education) was converted into an autonomous organisation called Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI). At that time Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI). Dhaka was under the administrative control of the Directorate of Agriculture but no mention was made about the fate of BAI in BARI's ordinance. Later on BAI was placed under the administrative control of BARI vide an executive order. .

Now the Ministry of Agriculture has taken over the administrative control of BAI and other two agri colleges by creating an Agri Education Wing. Of course, a recent ministerial order has asked BARI to continue to look after the administration and management of the Agri Colleges including BAI. As the services of the teachers is governed by the BARI's service rule, the teachers are facing a number

of problems on the way to their professional and career development. Because there are no specific clauses in BARI's service rule for evaluating the performances of the teachers who are doing a fully different type of job in teaching under-graduate level students.

In the aforesaid state of affairs, we would fervently call upon the Ministry of Agriculture to kindly fix the status of Agri Colleges i. e. whether these will be 'autonomous' or

'government' institutions while a separate service rule be framed for the teachers with a view to protecting the professional interests of the teachers and to save the higher agri education sector from ruination.

M Zahidul Hague

General Secretary

BAI Teachers' Association