

Resume Talks

Everybody is talking about the elections, and yet nobody is talking about solving the problems...

Frankly, we do not understand how our political leaders plan to hold the next election without any prior understanding between the ruling and the opposition parties...

We consider this to be a very shortsighted and politically naive strategy. After last four and a half years of experience, the ruling party should be convinced that for whatever its worth, the opposition has enough power and strength to throw a spanner in whatever plans the ruling party can have...

Stop It!

When will this horror stop? How? You don't really need to read in the press of stampede deaths of poor people. It is only a miracle that their mad rushes at all urban centres on all Eid occasions do not end up in stampede deaths...

Of course, police could work more efficiently to prevent these stampedes. But it is not for them to prevent the thronging. For there is accepted sanction for such public shows of charity. We can stop such massive spectacles of want and inhumanity by working on two fronts...

Charity is a virtue. It is a religious act too. But to make a show of it is not so religious a performance. Let not your right hand know what your left hand has given in charity...

Daily road deaths, then the interminable dowry deaths, the increasing incidence of murder and now these stampede deaths — this is our every day's read. And it surely is brutalising the mind of our society as a whole...

Towards Tolerance

Today is the International Day of Families. This is a new day introduced from this year by the United Nations. The initiative is Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's.

This year's theme pushes a little to the rear the subject-matter of the day. Religion and nationalism rather than contributing to an increase in tolerance, which they should have according to their protestations, have over the recent years been acting as positive boosters...

The old adage had it in other words: charity begins at home. Tolerance is a charity — a catholicity of mind, that should best begin at home or in the family. This cannot simply be in families of the Roman pater familias model...

Direct Vote and Democracy

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

higher status, undercutting the basic principle of exercise of adult franchise to fill all electable slots in a democracy. It gives an inordinate advantage to those with money and/or influence to become members of the Upper House...

PA elections (whose terms must also be shortened from five to four years as per Ms Benazir's pre-election promise). An important and positive announcement has been made by the Prime Minister Ms Benazir Bhutto with respect to reviving the Joint Electorate System...

only about 1000-2000 people to be representative of hundreds of thousands. This is not logical and must be done away with immediately. We note that PM Ms Benazir has appealed to the Leader of the Opposition, Mian Nawaz Sharif, to support her contention for a Joint Electorate System...

article (The Majority Vote) to determine the majority vote of the populace. This principle must be followed for the next tier i.e. District Councils, Town Committees, Municipal Committees, Municipal and Metropolitan Corporations with the proviso that only those who qualified for the Run-off election in the second tier vote are eligible for being aspirants for the third tier...

Our country is bedevilled by nepotism and corruption. The germs of these maladies lie in the "selection" rather than the "election" process that is presently in vogue in this country. The mechanics of our democracy is very wrong.

One should not forget that this concept of indirect vote was firmly rejected by the Pakistani populace in the form of Field Marshal Ayub Khan's 80000 Basic Democrats who formed an Electoral College to elect (Provincial and National) legislators, etc as well as the President. The Opposition to this concept stemmed from the fact that the masses were effectively disenfranchised by the indirect method...

When you have such a built-in self destruction mechanism to subvert the loyalties of one's own citizens, why should we worry about the other factors that militate against the integrity of the country? In another illogical arrangement, the whole country is the electorate in the present separate electorate system for the minorities. While logistically an impossible exercise for candidates, it allows persons who can command a core group of

thereby up the various levels those elected must have a direct mandate from the people and should not rely on back-room deals, influence-peddling and money-wheeling to become so-called "elected" representatives. The only change one would recommend is that once a village/mohalla Council is elected on a slate basis with the members being inducted on the basis of maximum votes in order of priority, whether they are 3 or 7 or 11 elected members (depending upon the size of the population), there should be a second round to determine who is the highest vote-getter in the constituency so as to be the Chairperson. Similarly those who are aspirants for the second tier i.e. the Union/Ward Council must have got at least 20 per cent votes in the first tier elections for the village/mohalla Councils to qualify for eligibility. Unless a candidate gets 50 per cent vote in the first round there must be a run-off election as explained in an earlier

Without going into the controversy of whether Senators Gulzar and Wagar are loan defaulters or not according to the list presented to the NA by the Agriculture Minister, Mr Talpur, the fact remains that a cursory enquiry reveals that these gentlemen do not seem to have many roots in any of the constituencies of the Punjab and that before 1985/1986 not much is known about them. However Senator Gulzar came "so close" to being nominated for the Speakership of the Senate, a heartbeat away from being the President of Pakistan. Without casting any aspersion on father and son, one condemns a system that "elects" those who cannot even relate to any particular constituency in the Province, a case with most of the Senators. The system is supposed to be democratic but contradicts the basic principle of adult franchise at every elected representative tier and negates the grassroots ap-

proach that is the very essence of democracy. While one may disagree with Ms Benazir and Mr Watto on any number of counts, their suggestions about the Joint Electorate System and direct elections to every tier of the Local Bodies system, seem to be rooted in democratic norms and not influenced by narrow partisan compulsions, at least on the surface. These suggestions must be modified to reflect transparency and carried to its logical conclusion. Our body politic must be cleansed from its various man-made aberrations. In the supreme interest of the nation these reforms (after due adjustments) must have complete and unreserved support from the Leader of the Opposition.

Our country is bedevilled by nepotism and corruption. The germs of these maladies lie in the "selection" rather than the "election" process that is presently in vogue in this country. The mechanics of our democracy is very wrong. While one cannot doubt that many corrupt individuals will still get through, the exhaustive election process up the various tiers will severely curtail their chances. The direct mandate of the people is the one person-one vote process which must be the ultimate and direct arbiters of candidacies for any elected office. Similarly by adopting the "grassroots approach" of qualifying the candidate aspirants for Provincial and National Assemblies as well as the Senate by making it obligatory for them to be part of the Local Bodies elections from its basic unit upwards, we would have ensured that the candidate aspirants for higher elected office must be deeply involved with the respective constituencies they are supposed to be representative of. Every elected office in the country including the Presidency must be directly elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise. That is the only way of making sure that the democratic system serves its main purpose, ameliorating the many problems of the masses.

Extraordinary Leadership Needed in the Battle for Survival

by Md Asadullah Khan

THE symptoms of desertification in the northern part of Bangladesh, the climatic variations in the length and breadth of the country, the long spell of drought still continuing through April, and the indiscriminate chopping of trees for use as fuel in the brick fields in the districts of Jessore, Khulna and Kushtia trigger an alarming signal for the whole country. The process has started slowly and much beyond our knowledge. The spectre of famine-like condition in parts of the country with horrifying consequences of destabilising democracy and good governance haunts the nation. We have already witnessed the sequel to such miscalculation in the preceding year which accounted for a shortfall of Aman production by about 30% in the northern districts presumed to be the granary of the country. Government is now paying a high price for the loss of crops by importing rice from India, Thailand and the USA. Sub-soil water level has gone down to such a low that power pumps are becoming ineffective. No wonder, the effect of Farakka barrage and indiscriminate and unilateral withdrawal of water of the Ganges by India has contributed significantly to all these calamities now stalking the nation.

the affair on our part has mostly gone downhill. Air pollution through emission of noxious gases from the factories, automobiles and other sources has grown significantly in parts of the country, especially in big cities like Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna. Looking back at the global scenario, broad atmospheric changes such as ozone depletion and the building up of green house gases are likely to trigger an alarming situation for the living species in the world, not excluding our part of the world. Statistics have it that the world has lost 500 million acres of trees since 1972 and 500 million tons of top soil, an amount equal to the size of India and France combined. Lakes, rivers and even the seas have been turned into sewers and industrial sumps. Tens of thousands of

emits 3% of all CO2 produced and accounts for 1% of the world's GNP. We have before us as an object lesson the now bankrupt countries of East block whose singularly inefficient path to industrialisation brought about some of the world's worst environmental disasters such as Chernobyl reactor leakage and Bhopal gas explosion. Man-made ravages continue to put our country at serious peril. Forest wealth of the country is on the decline going down to a meagre 7%. Indiscriminate logging of trees and pollution of lakes and rivers by use of pesticides have caused extinction of plants and living species badly needed for agricultural production and balance of life. Toxic waste and radioactive contamination

The worst environmental ravages such as chopping of trees for cooking fuel are rendered by people in our country who have no other form of income. These people must come out, rather made to come out from the ramshackle poverty to cherish and harbour such pious wishes. And here the rich countries must play their due role. Steps towards sustainable development will not come about unless some of the wealth from the rich countries finds its way to the developing nations. Paradoxically, so far the industrial nations have held pretty tightly to their purse strings. There were hints as early as in 1992 that as much as \$6 billion would be forthcoming in debt relief and other financial guarantees. That figure seems to be a pit-

maintain equilibrium in any country. But the bigger threats are the CO2 and other greenhouse gases produced in the industrialised countries by the burning of fossil fuels, that do not remain confined in the region it is produced but are drifted far away by air circulation. They are the producers but we, in the other part of the world are falling prey to their actions. US environmental scientist EPA Chief William Reilly has termed the results as most disturbing and vowed to push for more stringent international control on CFC (chlorofluoro carbon), the man-made chemical thought to be largely responsible for triggering the problem. Most developed countries have agreed to ban the substance by the year 2000. At the same time, the additional thinning of the pro-

their respective sizes, although countries that are levelling their forests are making the run-off problem especially bad. Our country ranking as one of the developing nations, shares a good deal of blame for forest wealth exploitation. We have considered forests ripe for exploitation in the form of potential farm land, a free source of fuel and a free source of exotic kinds of wood that command high prices within and outside the country. There is no replenishment worth mentioning.

It is a Herculean task and no country alone can achieve success. Taking effective action to halt the massive injury to the earth's environment will require a mobilisation of political will, international co-operation and sacrifice unheard of except in war time. It will be appropriate to call it a war for survival. It is a cause in which all nations must be allies.

In the face of all these challenges, the country has to develop its own strategies that can counter the damage done by Farakka. The insensibility of the neighbour and its power game must be viewed as a monstrous action and the country can't afford to remain a perpetual victim to all these challenges when its very existence as an independent and self-sustaining nation is at stake. And that calls for an awareness on our part and the people by and large should set out to confront the most pressing environmental problems — from global warming to desertification, including poverty and underdevelopment, that have touched off Bangladesh not in a very insignificant way.

plant and animal species that shared the planet with us in 1972 have since almost disappeared. People would have expected feverishly that with the end of the cold war tensions and awareness of these growing ecological crises, the developed countries of the world mainly Europe, North America and Japan would get a rare opportunity to look beyond their national boundaries and interests in reaching a common agreement to bring about some basic changes in the way we treat the environment. The developed countries of the world have been consuming a disproportionate share of natural resources and generating the bulk of global pollution. Many of the developing countries, for their part, are consuming irreplaceable global resources — eating the world's seed corn, as it were, to provide for their exploding population. Paradoxically, the US has 5% of the world's population but it uses 25% of the world's energy, it emits 22% of all CO2 (carbon dioxide) produced and accounts for 25% of the world's GNP. India has 16% of the world's population, it uses 3% of the world's energy and

could lead to shortages of safe drinking water, the sine qua non of human existence. And in a world that could house between eight billion and 14 billion people by the mid 21st century, there is a strong likelihood of mass starvation. The almost wholesale burning and cutting of forests in the districts of Sylhet, Khulna, Chittagong and Mymensingh are destroying irreplaceable species everyday. This calls for a sustainable development shunning the practices that are self-destructive. A sustainable society is one that manages its economic growth in such a way as does not cause any irreparable damage to its environment. By balancing economic requirement with ecological concerns, it satisfies the needs of the people without jeopardizing the prospects of future generations. But a major obstacle to such development in a country is perhaps the social structure that is unjust and that places most of the disposed of wealth to the disposed of a tiny minority of its people. A person who is worrying about his next meal will not agree to listen to all such gospels.

billion compared with the \$125 billion that a leading US scientist has said the developed countries will need to contribute annually to protect the natural resources and clean up pollution. The fact that in this summer the country has recorded the highest temperature since 1952 is most alarming. Computer projections and satellite readings collected between 1979 and 1990 present the most up-to-date problem. In the summer more people are moving outside and activities are numerous which cause building up of green house gases. Scientists today, all over the world, agree that all the smoke and fumes and exhaust that humans generate will eventually alter earth's climate. These could even trigger coastal flooding. Interior droughts that we are experiencing in parts of our country resulting in mass exodus as well as pockets of starvation. This global warming, scientists now believe strongly, must be attributed to the release of CO2 (carbon dioxide gas) from the burning of forest wood that are still there, much lesser than the prescribed dose needed to

rective layer of gases in the upper atmosphere might increase substantially the amount of harmful ultraviolet radiation reaching the earth's surface threatening a vast array of life forms. Developed countries have chosen our part of the world as the dumping ground of the toxic materials and hazardous wastes. The recent report published in a section of the newspaper that nearer our home, the Bay of Bengal, was found to be littered with rotten garlic is most disquieting. Any one who has been near the sea-shore will find the sea a mess, littered with plastic cans, tar balls and polythene bags. Other than these, the garbage dumps, the oil-spills, the sewage discharges, the drift-nets are only the most visible problems. But the real threats to the oceans accounting for 70% to 80% of all marine pollution are the sediments and contaminants that flow into the seas from land-based sources — topsoil, fertilisers, pesticides and all manner of industrial wastes. Undoubtedly, all the countries are contributing to this guilt roughly in proportion to

True it is that mobilizing this sort of mass commitment will need extra-ordinary leadership of the unique kind that has seldom appeared before in times of crises. Let it be emphasized that now, more than ever, the country needs leaders who can inspire their fellow citizens with a fiery sense of mission, not a nationalistic of military campaign but a gigantic crusade to save the life form here and elsewhere on the earth. Unless we are embracing the cause totally and without delay, we will only be hastening the path to gloom.

To the Editor...

BTV's evening news Sir, During the summer, the sun sets around 6-30 pm. So the evening begins at 6-30 pm not before. It is ironical that BTV telecasts a news bulletin namely sandhya khabar (evening news) at 5-10 pm in the afternoon. The title of the news bulletin is certainly appropriate for the winter when the sun sets around 5-30 pm. So, I would urge the Bangladesh Television authorities either to change the title of the bulletin as biketer khabar (afternoon news) or to reschedule the time to 6-30

pm for the summer. BTV authorities can deprive us of many things for, maybe, constrains of sorts, but can't mislead us with wrong information or presentation. Warda Nasser Ali 92, Central Bashabo, Dhaka

Rape victim Sir, I'm a foreigner, already staying in your country for almost a month. During this period, I have experienced hail-storm and HARTAL. HARTAL is not available in my country, and I can't say whether it is

right or wrong until and unless I understand its root and motive or whatever you may call it. But one thing which I can't understand is the logic or rational of naming a rape victim in the newspaper, and going too lenient on the rapist.

The name of the victim was reported in your newspaper on April 26, 1995. Even the name of the school and class were mentioned. Don't you have compassion for this school girl? Her life has been destroyed by two rapists, and you further aggravated her suffering by letting everyone in the school know about it. How

would she face them? How would her parent face the neighbourhood? How would she face the prospect of marriage? Her future? No doubt the incident happened about four years ago, there is no way her life can be the same again, forever.

Foreigner Dhaka The Ganges water sharing Sir, We are hoping that India will be gracious enough to let Bangladesh have its

rightful share of the Ganges water and thus allay the misery of millions of people in the northern districts of our country. The effect of the withdrawal of water is disastrous — farmers and fishermen had to abandon their former occupations and try to earn livelihood by becoming day labourers and rickshaw-pullers. And that only a part of them. The weather pattern is also changing drastically, causing intense heat so unbearable that people had to refrain from their normal activities. In one word, Farakka Dam has created a havoc in the northern districts of Bangladesh.

We trust that India will act in the true SAARC spirit and prove that it is not a meaningless jumble of words, and would not attach any condition in fulfilling the rightful demand of Bangladesh. It is very disappointing that India is linking transit facilities to the water sharing issue. We hope that countries included in the SAARC will come forward and help to resolve the dispute, not by whiling away time with endless discussions and meetings but with a concrete step. Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong