

Sham or Real Talks?

Our lead story yesterday said that BNP Secretary General, Abdus Salam Talukdar, has been assigned the task of reviving dialogue with the opposition. Well, our first reaction is, so what? We have heard it many times before.

While we are skeptical about the seriousness of the effort, we still welcome it, for without talks there is really no way out. There is a possibility that with the impending visit of the US Assistant Secretary of State, Robin Raphel, the ruling party wants to show the US leadership that it is trying its best for a negotiated settlement.

Given the fact that not too much time is left, and that both sides have realised that they are big enough and powerful enough not to be intimidated by each other, there should now be some sobering effect on both, and thus an improved possibility of an understanding.

We do not want a repetition of the arguments that we have so far heard. We want that both sides be flexible. A lot has already been achieved. The opposition's main contention that Begum Zia will not be in power during the next election has been resolved with the PM's declaration that she would resign 30 days prior to the polls.

Frankly this was the opposition's main goal which has been achieved. Perhaps a little more haggling will get the BNP to agree to 45 days. With this in the pocket, the opposition should sit down with the BNP to talk about how the country will be run during those crucial 30 or 45 days.

A Hope for Shashi Lodge?

On the surface, it looks quite a nice and likeable decision. The government at least has said something in public about a property called 'Shashi Lodge'. It has been decided that the Mymensingh Museum — whatever is that — would be moved to the fantastic piece of colonial architecture with an incomparably natural milieu called the Shashi Lodge.

The first response of all those who know Shashi Lodge would be one of relief. The bewitching marble nymph on the beautiful pedestal cannot keep the eyes riveted to it for a red-brick replica of the Buckingham Palace with milk-white friezes taking up the whole of the background draws them inexorably out.

The Shashi Lodge — the residence of Maharaja Shashikanta and Suryakanta — while it housed for decades the Women Teachers Training College never got as much as a kanakori for its worthy maintenance. What does the government handout speak about antiquities in that house? All of those had been looted away in prehistoric times.

The building is in a state fast nearing a wholesale collapse. Will it become a museum — after all the present museum on Amrita Babu Road is not fit to be a private collection of the district standard — help regain its past glory? That should not be impossible if the government is ready to do for it what it has done to Ahsan Manzil.

Unfortunate Pontification

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Cultural Affairs has condemned the recent holding of the Miss Bangladesh contest in Dhaka and has called upon 'concerned people' to refrain from arranging such contests which, according to the committee, were against the cultural tradition of Bangladesh.

Involving the parliamentary committee for the purpose of not only pontificating on what was in line with our cultural tradition or what violated it but also issuing a veiled threat against something not pertinent to legislation or even governance in general has been both indiscreet and unfortunate.

There are in fact many who would not love to have such show become a feature of Bangladesh's urban life. The question doesn't lie there at all. Shouldn't the question better be left to individuals having independent and undictated opinion of the thing?

One will be very much within one's rights to ask what has this moraliser done to date to see, using the same glasses they are using now to focus on the beauty contest, whether our government subsidised films of the private sector conform to our cultural tradition? The government organ in charge of regulating films are allowing a regular and interminable rape of our culture on the celluloid. Double standard is poor governance, decidedly.

Pronouncements pandering to the current rage of prejudices and feudal drags must be refrained from specially by the government lest the state and society as a whole be condemned to perpetual bullying by the few.

ON August 14, 1945, a dark haired sailor, Carl Muscarello tantalized millions of Americans and peace-loving people around the globe with his famous kiss on Edith Shain in the heart of Times Square in New York signifying the end of World War II. The contrast of the event symbolized the fractious world, as it were, and to a point human nature: the American sailor holding the nurse in a half dip, resembling something of a tango, but approximating almost a trostemp!

While the Times Square burst into jubilation with the Japanese surrender, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed into Stone Age. One lakh twenty thousand people died and thousands others were maimed with the first use of Nuclear weapons on the then War-Monger nation of Japan.

Soon after the Japanese surrender, an American, at first reluctant to enter the war, took shelter in their moral veneer and challenged humanity to an era of peace and tranquility. The failure of the League of Nations did not daunt them. They went to San Francisco, and following the Moscow Declaration of 1943 the world had recognized the necessity of establishing at the earliest practical date of a general international organization based upon the principle of sovereign equality of all peace loving states, large and small, for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The charter of the United Nations signed on June 26, 1945, in its preamble solemnly declared, "to save

succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our life-time, has brought untold sorrow to mankind..."

On December 4, 1961, an Irish proposal to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries led to the adoption of Resolution 1665 (XVI). On the basis of Resolution 2028 (XX) the Geneva 18-nation Disarmament Committee and subsequently United Nations General Assembly finalised a treaty which embodied obligation on both the nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. The coming into force of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) was part of the process of 'detente' which drew the superpowers to work together for a safer world. The world community did not want another Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

International Colloquium Organized by Groupe de Belrive, Geneva, June 1985.

Secretary General, International Commission of Jurists, Niall MacDermot, sometime Minister of State for Planning of the British government, joined hands with Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, president, Groupe de Belrive, and made seminal

Deadly Gambits

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contribution to the cause of nuclear non-proliferation. The same MacDermot, it may be recalled, was of great moral assistance to me personally for the cause of Bangladesh during 71-72 in supporting us directly and indirectly. Prince Sadruddin said in his concluding remarks, "In this Belrive meeting the menace of the bomb has forged one voice. It no longer had the exclusive accents of the East-West but the deeper tones of a world collectively at risk. I, a

extension to NPT. We understand three countries have refrained from signing the agreement: Israel, India and Pakistan. They consider many articles discriminatory and the document dysfunctional. I propose to contribute a separate column on this issue.

Regardless of the disagreements of some countries about the indefinite extension of NPT, it is quite an achievement.

The world is unequal although every man is born

mentation is not obligatory. To secure peace in the world the international community agreed to give extra power to the permanent members. With the extraordinary expansion of the General Assembly membership, 188 today from 46 member countries in the beginning a growing realization is dawning on all of us that Security Council perhaps needs a structural change — to make it more representative of the changed world and changed reality.

Deadly Gambits

At the height of Cold War Security was sought by both the superpowers US and the USSR to give a guarantee of security through unstrained arms race. It was soon realized by both the superpowers that arms alone could not guarantee security! At a time when both the US and the USSR had acquired enough nuclear stock-piles to destroy the world many times over, they seriously engaged themselves in negotiating to reducing their arms. The nuclear arms control from SALT to INF to START was the outcome. From Kissinger to Brezinski to Casper Weinberger to Al Haig to Eugene Rostov and the two Richards (Burt and Perle) — they all worked towards test-

ing the nerves of the Soviets and finally neutralized what Reagan called 'the margin of Soviet superiority' in Europe by planting tomahawk, Pershing and cruise missiles. Helmut Schmidt's 'Null-Losung' Zero option, is now a thing of the past. Even Paul Nitze who was always keeping his mind open and powder in his famous walk in the Woods with Khrushchev will soon become a foot-note in history and so will the 'force de frappe' of de Gaulle.

The supreme reality is that peace cannot be achieved only by war. Only the dead, as Plato said, knows eternal peace! In full realization of the pugnacity of human being the founding fathers of the United Nations brilliantly incorporated chapter 51 in the Charter — i.e. the right of self-defence of a member state of the United Nations.

CTBT

The ultimate goal, therefore, of the international community is the signing of the CTBT. The May meeting of NPT in New York is a precursor to the final realization of the dream of CTBT. The five permanent members have a moral obligation to do just that. And for that they must avoid any gambits which may be detrimental to the smooth passage to the CTBT trail in Geneva.

The writer is former Bangladesh ambassador to Italy and a member of the UN expert group on Economic and Social Consequences of Arms Race and Military Expenditures (ESCAR).



Muslim, am as much in danger as a Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu or a non-believer. These weapons are no respecter of creed, political belief or geography. We are as one before the bomb."

An historic decision: Indefinite Extension of NPT in May 13 1985 in UN. After a month-long debate, 175 countries took a consensus decision to give indefinite

equal. Without being cynical one is tempted to recall the Lilliputian king of Jonathan Swift. The right might just prevail over the wrong right. That is how we came away from the underlying principle of the League of Nations and agreed to vest veto powers to the five permanent members of the Security Council! The charter principle was crafted very carefully. One country one vote in the General Assembly; but the General Assembly recom-

MARRIAGES are made in heaven, true. But, the analogous rituals, festive to many and painful to some, are being continuously contrived on terra firma by us mortals. In fact, so many details are being associated with marriages that one practically needs a guide book on "how to," "what to" and maybe a "when to."

For those opting for an arranged wedlock, a "who to" is a must in the matrimonial shopping list.

This being a decent column, the above is not subtle hints on nocturnal episodes but the broader issues one has to cope with in carrying out the myriad customs, fashionable proprieties and endless protocols from the moment two families (yes, families) agree to marry till six months after the wedding. There have been extensions to the time period.

Notwithstanding the traumatic experience of showing the girl to the boy, where the standard rule is to hide prettier younger sisters if any, there are a zillion nitty-gritties that need to be attended for marriage ceremonies to run smoothly. And, let this be said without interruption from either party, that no component of the

marriage ceremony is smooth. That includes the myce dekha, paanchul with-out paan or chini, feminine gaye holud, masculine gaye holud, the actual walima reception, rasumat, bou bhaat, Jerani, etc.

The convoluted and craggy marriage customs are perhaps the heavenly signals of the rocky days ahead. With the partners abasailing their pebble-strewn life together marriages can perhaps be made blissful, but ceremonies never. There are bound to be lapses and every family is bound to have some overbearing relative who is simply hoping for flaws with a smirk plastered on His Griminess.

Did you not spell his name right? Tch! Tch! Did you not mention "and family"? And, did you know that "and family" does not include his son who is now married? You have to be cautious. Did you forget to invite her husband's uncle's daughter-in-law's mother-in-law's son? It is a serious flaw unless the son in question happens to be the bridegroom. Did you not deliver the card yourself? Unpardonable. Did you invite only the paternal cousins to

The Kazi Lived Happily Ever After

the yellow ceremony (gaye holud)? This might mean War.

At the yellow ceremony, watch your step not only to avoid the mashed turmeric on the floor, but because this is where the ghapta starts. The confusion is initiated with almost everyone from ole ole niece to Oh! La La aunt covered in yellow uniform, yellow flowers, yellow ornaments, yellow make-up.

to do the honours. I find it a total waste of turmeric as no amount of rubbing that yellow stuff will make anybody any fairer. Some of us might need truck-loads and more than a dozen ceremonies. It is of utmost importance that you do not mess up the order of the persons your request to rub yellow. Look for gloomy faces in the crowd and then you can easily zero in on the important one you missed

most of the Sombre-faced present would secretly felicitate your chivalry.

All said and done, marriages would never be the

same without these follies. Come to think of it, marriage ceremonies are also perhaps made in heaven. Despite everything no one is ever sure who lived happily ever after. The Kazi perhaps, is an educated guess.

Pinch of Salt by Chintito

The mood in the air is one of merriment and gaiety. It might appear that some have confused angti-bodol (change of rings) as a change of aunts. The dialogue of the ceremony is "Oh! Aunt, I thought you were your (school-going) daughter Tushpu." It might need a lot of courage and practice, but it works.

When your turn comes you will be told by a cacophony of voices that you should take the turmeric with the inside of your right-hand fingers, rub the slime on your forehead and then apply the ochre substance on the face of the person-to-be-married. Whatever the inner provocation, and for all you could care, you might feel like spluttering the upturned face. DON'T! But, if you did,



Yet there is a Chance for Resolving the Political Crisis

THE advisory opinion of the Supreme Court on the fate of the seats of the boycotting Parliament Members (MPs) has indirectly showed a symbol of an independent judiciary that provided the ruling and the major opposition parties with a chance for settling the dispute between them to overcome the long-standing political crisis.

In its opinion on the Presidential reference on the four specific questions relating to the consecutive absence for 90 sitting days and vacation of the seats of over 140 opposition MPs, under the constitution, Appellate Division of the Supreme Court has declared that the 'walkout' and 'boycott' by the MPs must be construed as absence from Parliament, resulting in the vacation of their seats. Thus, observers believe, the opinion of the highest court of the country has gone against the move of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to avert by-elections and complete its five-year tenure in power.

Following the declaration of the Supreme Court, now the ruling party can change its way in accordance with the constitution and unilat-

erally hold elections — by or general — which will be the solution to the present constitutional crisis. But the reason of the constitutional crisis — the nearly one-and-a-half-year old dispute between the ruling BNP and the major opposition political parties over how to ensure free and fair elections — will remain there. The opposition parties had been boycotting the parliament sessions since March 1 and tendered resignation from the parliament on December 28 last year, demanding elections under the supervision of a neutral, non-partisan caretaker government.

The observers fear that the dispute may be able to hinder any election or keep the agitating parties out of elections and thus destroy the already hurt prospects for democratic practices in the country. Moreover, it is worthless, costly as well as difficult for all the political parties. Election Commission and the country to hold the by-elections to such a large number of seats only months ahead of the expiry of fifth parliament.

The observers feel that the ruling party, which had apparently been ignoring the

opposition's tender for resignation and 90-day absence from parliament to complete its five-year tenure in power and avoid by-elections, was still eager to avert by-elections but there was no easier way required for it without an amendment to the constitution which was also not possible in the present parliament due to lack of two-thirds majority of the total number of MPs.

So, the bid to avoid by-elections necessitates an agreement between the ruling and the opposition parties to bring in an amendment to the constitution in the sixth parliament with retrospective effect. But the differences between the two sides over how to ensure free and fair elections remain steady and there is no fresh offer for dialogue between them to settle the row. The opposition parties, who were at best the observers of the BNP's move to avert by-elections and the role of the Supreme Court on the issue, are still demanding dissolution of the parliament and holding free and fair elections under caretaker administration which also appar-

ently requires amendment to the constitution. The ruling BNP, however, had been expressing strong reluctance to amend the constitution. The party is yet to decide next course of action after its legal defeat in the battle over by-elections.

Despite the sharp disagreement, the observers feel, a bright opportunity has been created at present for the two rival political camps to settle their tussle since no side favours by-election and the realisation of both the expectation of the ruling party and the demand of the opposition parties requires amendment to the constitution. The observers hope that a negotiated settlement could be able to avoid by-elections, ensure BNP's five-year tenure in power and hold free and fair elections to the sixth parliament in time pending amendment to the constitution in sixth parliament with retrospective effect as it happened in case of 5th, 7th, and 11th amendments.

In such an agreement, the observers advocate, the parties can determine, as basic formula, the ways and means

including presently unconstitutional measures required for brining an end to the over all political crisis.

If the major political parties in the country reach a consensus to resolve the prevailing political crisis by holding general elections under a caretaker government, they may form a nine-member council. Each of the two sides, the ruling and the opposition parties, will nominate four neutral, non-partisan personalities to the council which will work as "cabinet", as well as "Prime Minister" of the caretaker government. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court will join the "Prime Council" as ninth member in addition to his present judicial responsibilities.

The nominated members of the body will individually head several ministries and jointly make Prime Minister's decisions that the President of the country will execute on the advice of the "prime" body, partially similar to the Swiss executive. The decisions of "Prime Minister" and the "cabinet" will be made by majority of the nominated members of the body. If the nominated members are divided on an issue, the ninth

member, Chief Justice, will get a chance to give a casting vote to a side. Usually, he will initiate or propose nothing, attend no third views on any controversial issue within the body. A member of the Prime Council may authorise another member to work for him while he is away.

In accordance with this arrangement, the present Prime Minister will quit any time after advising the President to dissolve parliament and appoint the Prime Council. After holding to the sixth elections parliament under this caretaker government, the parties, as per agreement, will make the short-cut process to overcome the long-standing constitutional stalemate through amending the constitution, and democratise the caretaker government by arranging and winning a referendum on the issue.

On the other hand, the observers apprehend that if the parties miss the chance to reach an agreement ahead of the next parliamentary election, the existing crisis will surely worsen which may prove to be suicidal for all of them.

To the Editor

"Ekhon Baazta Hai"

Sir, This refers to the article under the above title published in The Daily Star on 27th of July. The writer deserves every appreciation for truly focusing on certain situations faced by the Bangladeshis living abroad. I, personally, support and agree with some of the points of the view expressed in the write-up. We must be proud of our own language, culture and identity. Why must we break our mouths to be strange lingual that has hardly any value. Bangladeshis living in the US, UK and the petro dollar countries are obliged to keep going with the required languages simply to cope up

with the circumstances, but suddenly not damn Urdu or other sub-continental languages, which have nothing to do with us. We should also encourage our visitors to learn the basic Bangla.

Since, I have spent some of my time in the UK and other parts of Europe I would like to share some of my experiences. During my early days in London, I was waiting in a queue for a job, just then some Pakistanis came straight upto me and enquired about my whereabouts in perfect Urdu. I replied "what did you say" as if I didn't understand. Regrettably, I did not come across many Bangladeshis, who would willing to speak Bangla and feel proud of the language

or culture. This types also boast of being settlers by generations and in some cases prefer to be of Indian origin perhaps for gaining sort of cultural ego. It appears that the article "Ekhon Baazta Hai" depicts those unfortunate statusless, and illegal Bangladesh immigrants, who are subject to various racial and social discriminations. The illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are even looked down by their own community people because of status and their inability to speak fluent English. Situation, therefore, compels them to open up to the rare queries from any fellow being brown sheer out of emotion and to be friendly.

Leaving those who are far away, what about those in our own country? How many of us are really interested in the typical pure Bangla culture? Why then the English/Hindi films, specially the Zee programmes have taken us all by a strange hypnotism Star/Urdu and Hindi Gazals are the new found pride in most upper and rich societies! Let the true spirit and dynamism of our own ancient culture grow deeper in us. Let's try to share and understand the hard realities. Let's stop being dogmatic by branding only one particular group as opposed to true nationalism.

English-medium Institutions

Sir, Standard of English in our educational institutions has gone down alarmingly over the past two decades. Even after obtaining university degrees most of the incumbents cannot even write a letter in English correctly. It is true that for mass education, medium of instruction should be Bengali but a minimum knowledge of English should be acquired by every college and university student since English is an international language. As a second language importance of English needs no emphasis. But these days it is often

difficult to find a suitable teacher of English. If the teachers themselves are weak in English, we cannot expect the students to learn the language well. This is impractical. Hence Govt. should take initiative to set up at least one English-medium school in each district and one English-medium college in every greater district so that the prevailing dearth of English teachers can be met within the next few years. Planning Cell of the Education Ministry should look into the matter seriously before it is too late.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment