

## PM's Concern for Hawkers

At last the problems of the city's hawkers have got the Prime Minister's attention. She has assured a few thousand hawkers, who assembled at her Hare Road office to express their allegiance to her party, the BNP, of administrative and financial help and assistance for a smooth conduct of their business. The Prime Minister's assurance, although belated, is welcome. If the hawkers receive the recognition they deserve both as citizens and as professional groups, it will be to every one's satisfaction.

However, the assurance will be as good as the practical steps taken to redeem it. In the meantime, the Prime Minister's announcement has had a political overtone in that she has made some commitments which sound somewhat like an election pledge. Discernably, this has come about after the hawkers have expressed their allegiance to the BNP and opposed the opposition's hartal programme. But hawkers do have their genuine problems that call for an urgent redressal on a non-partisan and apolitical basis. The Prime Minister's move does not go far beyond what can be construed as politics of appeasement. Her eagerness to solve the hawkers' problem would have been better appreciated had she not needed any such occasion for the overtone. Even so, we greet her move to set things right on the hawkers' front simply because it is coming from the highest level of the administration.

Quite cogently, she asks the hawkers not to pay any 'toll' to either the police or the *mas'tans*. The poor traders are parting with some of their hard earned money to the extortionists under duress, coercion or even threat of lives. So, we urge the Prime Minister to take suitable administrative steps for an effective containment of all forms of extortionist behaviour.

We suggest that before the long-term programmes — such as the one relating to hawkers' rehabilitation — are taken up, there is some spade-work to be done to ensure their well-rounded implementation. Let the Prime Minister order actions in areas where these are needed in the first place. The agencies found wanting or at fault can be the immediate target of her corrective steps in *sofaras* extortions go. That step will go a long way in increasing public trust and confidence in the system and do a great deal of good to our society.

## Reduced Remittances

Remittances from Bangladeshi expatriate workers, a solid pillar of economic strength for us, declined substantially between January and August of the current year. Whereas receipts per month averaged 96.13 million US dollar in 1994 these dropped off to 90.42 million US dollar in the January-August period of 1995.

The crunch comes as an upshot of the deportation of allegedly illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from Saudi Arabia and Malaysia in recent times. Furthermore, intake of our manpower, especially by Malaysia, the second largest labour market for us after the Middle East, has ground to a halt. In comparison with the despatch of 20,375 workers abroad per month in 1993, we sent out, on an average, 16,112 per month between January and August of the current year.

We cannot quite liken the present scenario to the aftermath of the 1990 Gulf War. Because, the current setback is a serious indictment on the free-for-all mishandling of the manpower business, largely by us. It has been a reflection of an unethical nexus between private parties on the one hand, and between officials and private recruitment agencies on the other. So, a price had to be paid down the road. As it happens now, the private recruitment agencies are out of business so far as Malaysia is concerned.

Bangladesh and Malaysia have decided that manpower trade would be conducted exclusively at the government level through the mutually authorised channel opened between the Foreign Workers' Task Force (FWTF) of Malaysia and the Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL). Now, it would depend upon the dynamism of both sides to increase the offtake from Bangladesh. Illegal immigration has been willy-nilly an indicator of a potentially high demand for our workers abroad. This now needs to be met but only through the official channel — that's all.

The wayward private recruiting agencies should be chastened by virtue of the cancellation licences of some of their colleagues. Even their colluding partners here and there, should take heed. Let the business be in good and safe hands.

## Ozone Hole

An ozone hole measuring 3.6 m square miles and, almost the size of Europe, has developed, dreadfully to say the least, over the southern hemisphere. Merely 20-30 km above the snow-capped Antarctica you have that incomprehensible void through which the excessive ultraviolet rays of the sun are intruding on the earth. The protective ozone layer is now a virtual contradiction in terms; for, it can neither absorb the UV radiation nor can it block the same.

In immediate terms, the surge in UV radiation is a cause for serious concern; because it bodes an increase in the incidence of cancer and a damage to vegetation and food-production.

The pertinent question is: has there been a follow-up on the Montreal accord signed by 46 industrial nations on January 1, 1990 to bring down the levels of consumption of CFCs? Have the industrial countries cut back on their production of CFCs found in refrigerator coolants and solvents, in aerosol sprays, and plastic foams used in hamburger cartons?

To get answers to these questions, it is high time we have an emergency meeting under the United Nations Environment Programme. Clearly an update on the situation with a focus around the technology to stop any further ozone depletion is called for.

**A**CTING as the voice of the Federal Government, President Farooq Khan Leghari suspended the Punjab Government for a period of two months, asking the Governor to assume all powers. A day earlier, all the PPP ministers, in CM Manzoor Wattoo's Provincial Cabinet had resigned as an orchestrated move to create "suitable" conditions to justify Presidential action. While no tears can be shed (without resorting to hypocrisy) for the Wattoo Coalition which was unnatural in the first place and overdue for demise, democracy could have been better served by asking Wattoo to take a 'vote of confidence' route or, better still, to have moved a vote of no-confidence against him while he was in power. Twice now, the President has used his powers to intercede and interfere in the principle of provincial autonomy by causing the demise of the NWFP and Punjab Governments to facilitate the entry of a PPP-led Coalition Government. Technically within Constitutional parameters, as far as the norms of democracy he is constitutionally pledged to uphold, the President stands on rather shaky moral grounds.

Another round of manipulation and horse-trading by both major political groupings was set in motion, this shameful exercise denigrates the entire democratic system. While his partiality and judgement can be called into question, the President is a decent human being and he should have adopted a more neutral stance so as not to call his partiality and judgement into question. The President must not forget he was a victim of 'Mehrangate', the scam perpetrated by Mehran Bank's unscrupulous Younus Habib (remember him?) and others to maliciously defame his character. Haji Nawaz Khokhar, the then PML (N) MNA, was most vicious in demanding an "egg and tomato" assault on the President in the NA during his address. It was only when he jumped ship and went across to the PPP that it became clear his 'more loyal than the king' cheer-leading, ostensibly on behalf of Mian Nawaz Sharif, was part of a master scam devised to dupe (and ensure) that the

# Head-hunting and the President

The head-hunting for MPs in the Punjab may be a major event, it pales against the crucial decision in the next few weeks that the President will have to make, albeit with advice from the PM but not bound by it constitutionally, about the successor to the COAS.

Opposition remained in confrontation with the President lest his known upright nature lead him to "positive neutrality" as per his Constitutional role.

Who was behind this conspiracy? Before those of us led astray by the scam could render an apology of sorts, we were rudely awakened to reality by the Punjab Blitzkrieg led by the Governor, Lt Gen (Retd) Raja (Von) Sarpoo. Those of us who had seen (and maybe fantasised) about the President becoming independent for the good of Pakistan, have to live with the fact that the widely awaited transition of Leghari from PPP stalwart to being the President of all the peoples of Pakistan has suffered a setback.

The PML (N) and the PPP indulged in the usual numbers game in the race to make a government in the Punjab. Governor's rule, albeit temporarily, gave an important edge to the PPP's head-hunters who, armed with bagful of money and the official stamp of authority (not averse to using the fair name of the Army), swung the swing-vote of 25-30 MPs quite efficiently. The Punjab legislators cannot become an un-purchasable commodity overnight (as unlikely a possibility as the sun rising in the west). Having dithered over principles in accepting Wattoo back into the PML (N) fold for over two years, the PML (N) had earlier made and 180 degree turn-around and principles notwithstanding symbolically embraced him, causing anguish among those loyalists who had suffered at Wattoo's hands. Mian Nawaz Sharif has to be commended for finally displaying political horse-sense in learning that the art of pragmatism and compromise is inherent in politics, albeit maybe too late this time around in closing the barn door after the horse had bolted.

The tantalizing question is, will this convince Chattha

to come to Muslim League senses? Such is the concept of loyalty and commitment in this democracy of ours that legislators have to be kept under sequestration and in hiding lest they be wooed away by the other party. This forcible captivity to coerce an individual to vote against the will of the electorate is an insult to the integrity of the individuals. Parliamentarians the world over in similar situations would ascertain the mood of the electorate and synchronise that with their own judgement in the best interest of their country, not their pockets. The desires of the people who make up the electorate in the Pakistani version of democracy seem to count for nothing either to the political parties or the

prime candidate for Governor's rule, primarily for "law and order" as well as "corruption", for the past three years the Federal Government has been assisting the Provincial Government to stay afloat only with the help of law enforcement agencies (as well as the Army, till they withdraw unilaterally on Nov 30, 1995). The entire urban area of Sindh is represented in the National Assembly by legislators who could never have been voted into the National Assembly if the MQM had not (in a moment of sheer political madness) insensitively boycotted the NA elections. Unrepresented at the national level, the urban electorates' representatives at the Provincial level are either in

privatisation' in the manner that others have been.

Since the Pakistan Army is famous for its blind subservience to whoever is the Chief, the possibility of it becoming a loyal Praetorian Guard has obvious connotations for the rulers. Since anyone who rises to Lieutenant General's rank must be taken to be professionally competent, for the post of COAS, we must tick off against a checklist of positive and negative qualities, to find out whether the COAS aspirant has (1) honesty, integrity, competence and professionalism in the eyes of his colleagues as well as the rank and file of the Army. (2) seen any action in the many operations during the past 35 years or so i.e. heard a shot being fired in anger, in either (a) Dir-Bajaur operations 1959 (b) Feni River — Asalong Mouza Operations 1962 (c) Rann of Kutch (d) 1965 war (e) 1971 war (f) Balochistan Operations 1973-5 and (g) Siachin 1985-ongoing. (3) links or inclination towards any political party or involvement in any political (or electoral) manipulation. (4) been involved in any misusing of his office for personal benefit, personal projection etc. (5) hint of involvement with (and support of) a foreign power and (6) a good reputation among the people of Pakistan (or at least those who know of him). The benefit of doubt for these factors should go to the country rather than the individual.

The level of professionalism for the apex appointment demands that a person should have commanded (on promotion) an infantry and/or Armour Brigade, Infantry and/or Armour Division and a Corps for at least one year, sufficient to receive at least one Annual Confidential Report (at least one year) in each appointment. The man should never have been passed over at any rank, particularly Brigadier upwards as that reveals a quirk in his professionalism or, worse, in his character.

The prized appointment of Chief of General Staff must be considered a bonus but is not a must. Of the four candidates in order of seniority, two from infantry, one from armour and one from artillery, three have clearly gone the route, only the one from artillery has been recently pushed into the command of a Corps to make up for the requirement in the form of force-level manipulation. he was also been twice passed over for promotion to Major General's rank. As regards war experience is concerned, the same three individuals (two infantry and one armour) stand out as having served their country well, both in 1965 and 1971 wars, having commanded respectively infantry companies and an armour squadron in battle. In contrast the gunner aspirant saw through both 1965 and 1971 wars in 'safe staff/instructional appointments far from the cauldron of war, discretion being the better part of valour. Despite his obvious demerits, rumours indicate that the ruling party's first choice as he not only 'delivered' in 1993 but is seen to be 'loyal' and 'malleable'. — remember Ziaul Haq?

It would be a sad commentary on the sincerity to the nation of our rulers if they are looking for less rather than more as leadership qualities for this most vital institution. This is in fact a litmus test of the patriotism and commitment of the rulers for this nation since this nation's survival depends almost wholly upon the integrity and professionalism of the Army (and thus its Chief)? A wrong choice must be taken clearly as vengeful intent meant to destroy the Army. The President must veto any controversial and undeserving person, for once exercising his authority solely in the interest of the nation and not acting blind, deaf and dumb. As a public school product and former civil servant, the President should be acutely sensitive to the fact that there is a long list of deserving professional soldiers with war experience and basic integrity to choose from. One exhorts him to make the right decision and choose an honourable man.

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

elector legislatures. The present system is a constitutional farce contributing to the disintegration of the nation.

Among the factors cited by the President were "bad law and order situation" and "corruption" whereas the real danger to PPP was that the CM Punjab would have requested dissolution of the Assembly thereby automatically triggering off an election in three months. As any one (and her uncle) know Mian Nawaz Sharif would sweep the polls, therefore the reluctance of PPP to test their "popularity" at the altar of the peoples' will. A vote of no confidence in the NWFP may well be in the offing. Ms Bhutto may have won the Punjab battle and may well also win in the NWFP if tested but she stands to lose the war with respect to Federal power. Nawabzada Nasrullah may yet become PM.

Rather than Punjab or NWFP, Sindh should be a

jail, in exile or underground, physically made incapable of bringing their problems to the attention of the President whom they voted for en bloc and there is reason to believe that all may not have fallen on deaf ears. It is true that militants within MQM have resorted to terrorism but it is also true that militants in all political parties have taken to criminal activity.

The head-hunting for MPs in the Punjab may be a major event, it pales against the crucial decision in the next few weeks that the President will have to make, albeit with advice from the PM but not bound by it constitutionally, about the successor to the COAS, Gen Waheed, who retires on 10 January 1996 and has reportedly declined an extension. The President (a keen *shikari* himself) therefore becomes the chief head-hunter on whom rests Pakistan's future because the Army is one institution that has not been subjected to

# Deepening Political Crisis: What Else than Megalomania?

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

**F**REQUENTLY requests appear in the press for Prime Minister Khaleida Zia and AL chief Sheikh Hasina to sit together to solve the protracted political crisis; which has placed the people in utter confusion and suffering. We don't know if those requests/appeals merit any consideration from them. But, on the other hand, their activists are preparing for and virtually staging war of confrontation in the street. Meanwhile 32 hours hartal called by the Opposition has been observed throughout the country, in spite of the strong speech of Prime Minister Khaleida Zia on 1st September, 1995 (the 17th founding anniversary of BNP). And the hartal, which started from 6 am of 2nd September for 32 hours, ended with the announcement of new programme by the mainstream opposition parties from their respective platforms. Accordingly, dawn to dusk hartal has been observed on 6th September, '95, the date of sitting of 21st session of the fifth parliament.

Officially it is for the first time that one-party parliament is in session now; since the mainstream opposition parties remained absent from 1st March, 1994. Earlier, the Speaker ruled out the resignation letters tendered by the MPs of opposition parties. Later, 142 seats were declared vacant, based on the

opinion of the Supreme Court, for their absence for ninety consecutive sitting days, as per Article 67(1)(b) of the Constitution. It may be recalled that mainstream opposition parties did not accept the ruling of the Speaker, in view of what is contained in Article 67 (2) of the Constitution. After the seats of opposition MPs have fallen vacant on 20th June '95, the Chief Election Commissioner has shifted the date of by-election, which has fallen due, on the ground of 'act of God', i.e. the flood situation, till 16th December 1995. However, the Election Commission holds the view that they extended the time, independently, without being influenced by the Government, as per proviso to Article 123 (4) of the Constitution. This provision was incorporated in the 12th amendment of the Constitution.

Who knew that proviso to Article 123 (4) would further compound a complicated situation and shake confidence in the Election Commission? As a matter of fact, it did. There is logic in the argument that there are places, where flood situation was not so alarming that polling could not be held; EC could proceed step-by-step. But, unfortunately, that did not happen; and in view of past experience, disbelief was quite natural. So, while AL was holding

meeting and demonstration against the decision of EC, it was unfortunate that allegedly student front of the party in power would open fire killing an AL worker on 27th August 1995. It was followed by, strife and confrontation on 3rd September 1995.

If we look back at the events during the last 18 months, we can hardly locate a situation where party-in-power made any serious efforts to come to a settlement with the opposition and bring back the opposition MPs to parliament, to make it effective and the situation normal. BNP Government could settle the issue of caretaker government amicably within the parliament before the resignation of the opposition MPs. The situation would not have gone out of control, as it appears now, if the Prime Minister declared, one day ahead, instead of 29th December, '94 in the public meeting at Munshigonj that she would resign before 30 days of the election. Then, what followed? Every burning issue was kept hanging, in one way or the other. Well, one AL MP 'Majbhandari' all on a sudden joined BNP, one MP of Jamaat joined BNP, three MPs of Jatiya Party joined BNP. How much BNP has gained is better known to them. But those MPs who joined, purely for politics of expediency, will not bring

any change in politics.

The opposition parties were not wrong, when they called the 21st session of fifth parliament illegal and ineffective, when 142 seats of MPs have fallen vacant. But, the Govt. party is not willing to accept this constitutional argument. Instead, they hold the opinion that till the President dissolves the parliament, it will remain legal and effective. It is felt by many that earlier the institution of Speaker has been made disputed; now by summoning the 21st session of the parliament (one-party) the neutrality and dignity of the office of President has been brought under criticism. The right course would have been for the President to dissolve the parliament under Article 72 (1) of the Constitution.

After observing hartal on 6th September '95, the mainstream opposition parties have again given hartal programme from 16th September for three days. Will the party-in-power continue to stick to 'wait and see policy' and remain irresponsible to the wishes of the men in the street? It is hardly possible to predict in which manner both the quarters will react. It is easy for the party-in-power to show strength, and support and thus perhaps undermine the opponents. Likewise, those

who are now under 'opposition' banner, are not wholly democratic minded, as one unfolds their past records, particularly the fallen autocrats Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami. But, they are taking advantage of the prolonged stalemate to rehabilitate themselves in politics again. The situation became complex when Prime Minister Khaleida Zia went to Beijing, to attend World Women's Conference, paying little attention to the allegation of rape and killing of Yasmin by police on 24th August '95, which sparked the bloody Dinajpur agitation. It does not speak well about BNP administration. Time has come for the saner elements and politicians in BNP to raise protest against power orgy and blindness. But, will it be so?

We understand that novice elements, who do not understand the relationship between politics and people, have made inroads into the main political parties, mostly in BNP and AL. It is interesting to observe and that BNP chairperson talks to foreign emissaries, assisted by the Foreign Minister and Foreign Secretary while BAL chief Sheikh Hasina is also assisted by former Foreign Minister and former Foreign Secretary of Ershad regime! In spite of there being these seasoned diplomats in both the camps, neither the Commonwealth formula of Sir Ninian could

see the light of the day nor the recent visit of Mrs Robin Raphel, American Assistant Secretary of State, could produce any visible result. The responsibility lies with our leaders and not with foreign envoys. We feel ashamed to see outside interference in our domestic affairs.

No doubt, the demand for neutral caretaker government, as proposed by AL chief and others, would not have been so raised, if the electoral machinery, from headquarters to field, had not been defiled and its credibility questioned. Regrettably, 'public officers' do hardly discharge their responsibilities as officials of the republic. For one reason or the other, they still seem to be attuned to toe the line of the party-in-power. Considering the prevailing situation, the demand for neutral caretaker government seems practical and rather essential to hold free and fair election.

So, it is the avowed duty of the Prime Minister and BNP chairperson Khaleida Zia and the leader of the opposition and AL chief Sheikh Hasina, to come out of their respective party 'confinement' and hold dialogue, to reach an agreed formula, and help reverse the process of disturbance and destruction.

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## To the Editor...

### Overhauling the UN

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to an article viz. "Overhauling the United Nations in a Challenged World" by UN Secretary-General Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali published in several English dailies recently in Dhaka. This article was supplied to the press by UNIC in Dhaka. Dr Boutros-Ghali mentioned several steps taken to overhaul the UN. In the article there was a mention of spending \$60 million for the recent Copenhagen Social Summit, though in fact, the total assessed cost for this conference was just \$2.4 million. In this context 'Aid and Charity Groups have criticized the UN Social Summit (Copenhagen: March 6-12) as no more than an expensive jamboree'. Almost the similar outcome we observe from the much expensive UN summits at Rio de Janeiro and Cairo.

The world population is disheartened to observe the failure of the United Nations in healing the severe inhumanity in Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia, Chechnya, etc caused, watched and enjoyed by the

so-called modern civilization which vividly reveals and testifies the degree of intolerable moral degradation throughout the globe today. Keeping this view in mind, now many people are realizing that the United Nations is lacking in "something" in its approach to tackle the problems of the contemporary world. This "something" is the essence of morality and humanity which has to be associated in its all processes aiming at ensuring real and durable peace and social justice at all levels of mankind at all times.

In this context we want to draw the attention of the United Nations to a much talked about issue viz. "A Proposal to the United Nations on Moral Development Approach: A New World Order for Peace" initiated by an eminent educationist Dr Abu Obaidul Huque, Professor and Director of Bangladesh Institute for Advancement of Science and Technology Teaching. This proposal is undoubtedly a unified and integrated approach to solve all the widely talked about problems of the contempo-

rary world like poverty, AIDS, violation of human rights, oppression on women, environment pollution, terrorism, drug abuses, smoking, etc.

Through the press media it is observed that this proposal of Prof Huque to UN on universal moral development is gaining popularity at home and abroad. We wholeheartedly support this proposal and appeal to the UN and its member states to consider this proposal in overhauling the United Nations, for creating atmosphere for real and durable global peace and social justice.

Sayed Akhter Swatee, President, Dhaka University Moral Revival Forum (DUMRF)

### Beauty contests

Sir, Nearly all the comments made in your newspaper on 27 August, 95 on the Beauty Pageant under Focus sounded apologetic and like a plea for compromise. None sounded convincing or self-behaving. They reflected a weakness of statement.

The letter by Spectator on 27 August '95 has asked for opinions from others. In response I am putting down mine.

First of all the definition of beauty is beyond description, secondly, the most beautiful women of a country do not usually participate in such contests, hence the results are always subjective; thirdly, Bangladesh can improve its image by other means such as publicising the women who are qualifying at famous universities in the States and Europe with high degrees in science and arts; fourthly, if women in jandani sarees or shalwar-kameez are to parade for beauty, we can get a regular survey done at all the city weddings and state functions and award them (perhaps with fairer results). There is a Bangla saying: *Ghumtar neechey khemta naach hoye na*.

Finally, I really think that the unchangeable inherent nature of men (called *fitrat* in Arabic) has led society to set up certain norms and restrictions, one being to maintain a cover of modesty in one's so-

cial life.

It is better for the country to raise the value of its women through other means. In view of our socio-cultural attitudes it is better for Bangladesh to take on its plate what it can enjoy and eat.

Shona Fayyaz, Dhaka

### Pakistan's foreign policy

Sir, Mr Ikram Sehgal's article on Pakistan's Foreign Policy published in the Daily Star of 24 August has been read with interest by me. We appreciate his interest in Pakistan's foreign policy but are obliged to point out some contradictions in the article. At the same time we would like to emphasize that one has to be mindful of the fact that there might have been a number of constraints which influence the policy makers to pursue a certain specified direction despite the availability of other seemingly easy and more attractive al-

ternatives.

Mr Sehgal admits that foreign policy is the prerogative of an elected government. By the same token that elected government should have the prerogative to consult any number of agencies that it may deem fit in the formulation of its policies. We therefore find no fault with the input from different agencies in the policy making functions in Pakistan.

This consultative mechanism has however not taken away the primary role of the Pakistan Foreign Office in implementing the foreign policy framed by a popular government. The Foreign Minister being the senior most diplomat of the country has been extremely active as is borne out by the record of his numerous visits to such places as Somalia, Bosnia, Central Asia and Afghanistan as well as his several statements and meetings covering all major aspects of Pakistan's foreign policy.

Muhammad Hussain Malik, Minister (Press), High Commission for Pakistan, Dhaka