The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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The Choice at Hand

We are into the final hours of historic political decision-making. Two overlapping scenarios are before us. In these fleeting moments of the count-down, we are required to settle for one and come quickly out in the clear to proceed smoothly on to the general election, albeit by consensus.

Let's take the ultimate option first, namely the dissolution of Parliament and announcement of the schedules for parliamentary elections. The process of general election is to be completed within the period between January 4 and April 4, 1996. Now the constitutional exigency of holding by-elections on December 16 leaves us with barely 19 days before January 4 whence the process of general election must begin. A knee-jerk response to the situation would be to concentrate rightaway on general elections, unmindful of the crucial importance held by the by-elections to facilitate the parliamentary polls by consensus. If the 'five plus five formula' regarded as the only way out of the impasse is to be given the chance it so pre-eminently deserves then the by-elections must necessarily be held.

In what appears to be an ice-breaking overture. the BNP policy-planners have come forward to suggest lately that a consensus as to who would head the interim government could be reached if and when the opposition sits across the negotiating table. This should be cashed in on by the opposition. The way to go about it would be to agree to a dialogue contingent upon an a priori written understanding given by the ruling party that this indeed shall be the lead item of agenda at the talks. In the first place though, the opposition must announce its unambiguous endorsement of the five plus five formula.

It is worth noting that the BNP's acting general secretary Mannan Bhuiyan has said his party is even prepared to wait till the filing of nomination papers for the by-polls to reach an agreement with the opposition on the bipartisan government formula.

We implore both sides to immediately make simultaneous public announcements categorically affirming the five plus five formula as the basis for a mutually honourable solution to the political tangle.

Fall of a Titan

Lech Walesa, the charismatic Polish leader and President of the republic since 1989, has been defeated by former Communist Party leader Aleksander Kwasniewski in an almost photo-finish race to presidency. Although this would come as a surprise for many around the globe, more informed people have been preparing their mind for such an eventuality. The shift in Polish political loyalty has been gradual, slow and yet steady over a considerable period for all to perceive. Yet the warsaw stock market fell by some points with the receipt of the news. Kwasniewski will have to begin his tenure with such a persisting disadvantage. A paced-up rate of privatisation and other free market-friendly measures would be needed of him to counter this.

Although he will get a supportive Parliament where his party SLD forms majority, he is on notice of a constant pain in the neck and the name of the pain is Walesa. Whatever Lech has been as a President, he is far more powerful as an agitator. It was his work in the solidarity that shook the base of Soviet power and in the end led all East Europe to a liberation of the new kind. This mighty man has not taken his defeat sportingly. Kwasniewski for a fair and benign sailing will need to minimise the Walesa factor by beating the elder statesman in his own game - democracy and market economy.

The first words from the new President bode well for the nation. The tennis-playing President saw in his victory a win for democracy and says he believes that in this the Polish people has shown both maturity and an aptitude for democracy.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was, along with Walesa's work in Poland, hastened by developments in the Baltic states. There too the former communists are staging a grand comeback. With Poland's results in, the same trend has overtaken all of East Europe. What is one to read in these developments? One, never take people for granted. Two, don't be an alarmist thinking the evil empire is reviving. Be democratic and have faith in the people.

NGO Intervention

NGOs are known for their measurable output. While they have earned a good name because of this, they would also be exposed to criticism quite easily if they fail to deliver the goods. Since the NGOs work at the microlevel in transparent cooperation with the local community, their activities read like an open book. Even so, evaluation of their work by experts is always welcome.

We are thus appreciative of the outcome of a study made recently by Dr Khaleda Salahuddin and Prof Ishrat Shamim on the performance of NGO programmes in poverty alleviation at Gopalganj in the district of

Manikganj. The credit-ceiling being Tk 5000, the tendency on the part of a loanee or his or her near ones has been to use the paltry sum for purposes unrelated to sustained self-employment. What is worse, they take loans from other NGOs when under pressure for repayment to the NGO that had initially given him or her a loan. The person is consequently entrapped in a debt cycle like he would have been had he stepped into the vicious world of rural mahajans .

The NGOs intervening in poverty alleviation had better materially strengthen their programmes and add counselling, guidance and supervision to these lest they are blamed for spawning pauperisation, exactly the opposite of what they had set about achieving.

"Twelve Little Aliens"

by Firdous Murshid

Let us launch a full-scale campaign to prevent human trafficking. Let us relentlessly hunt out the criminals and their masters. Let us tell the world that we are 120 million proud souls and we will not have our women and children abused in alien lands.

forces are shaping this relatively new trade in human misery in the closing years of with Bangladeshi boys going to Dubai? Aren't they going to the 21st century? And finally, what have we done as a earn foreign exchange for the country? This must be a consociety, as a nation of 120 spiracy to deprive us of our million people, as a share of the Middle-East democratic government, as a member of OIC, the UN and labour market — and even SAARC, to combat these Santa is involved!"

OW many hundreds or

thousands of little

▲ boys have gone mis-

sing from our shores? How

many women have been sold

into abject slavery? What

crimes against humanity,

crimes against the very soul

unconcerned, insensitive and

apathetic — because we have

selves, our women and our

children. This is the saddest

statement that anyone can

make about a nation, yet this

is precisely the message

brought back by the twelve

little boys rescued from

Bombay airport. News of the

rescue reached Bangladesh

soon after the event, some

four years ago. It took all

these years for our

'democratic government' to

bring these hapless boys

back. This simple fact says

everything. I can picture

plainly the diplomatic activity

claiming to have rescued

some Bangladeshi boys about

to board a flight to Dubai

Foreign Ministry Official:

err Madam, they are

that ensued.

from Santa Cruz!"

no love or respect for our-

We have chosen to remain

of Bangladesh?

HC: "No, No Madam -Santa Cruz is Latin for Holy Cross - that's the name of their airport in Bombay. Anyway Madam, these are little boys we are talking about apparently destined for the Camel races in the Gulf states."

Madam: "Camel races? Anyway, what's the problem

HC: "Apparently, these boys are strapped on to the backs of camels during the races. The terrified little wretches scream in pain and fright — and this makes the camels run even faster."

Madam: "I see, I see this is very very distressing! But tell me how do we know these are our boys I still think there is a conspiracy Anyway, make a thorough investigation and make sure they don't send us their orphans!"

HC: Madam, should we investigate the demand side of the problem too? Perhaps Madam: "What's wrong the Foreign Ministry could take it up at the OIC? or with the governments of the Gulf

Madam: "No, No, No! We do not want to embarrass the brotherly nations of the Ummah ... with whom we have such close ties ...".

I have no idea how long

we deliberated on this phase of our diplomatic effort. I feel certain, that the initial impulse of the GOB was to question the validity of the reports. Pause for a minute. dear reader and consider, if such an event concerned twelve European boys or Japanese boys, or even Indian boys, what would have been the response of the concerned nations and their media? I would hazard the guess that repatriation would occur within 24 hours.

Having established authenticity, the GOB presumably pondered over the question of how to pay for the costs of travel for these twelve. A country that squanders crores of taka on dubious projects and bad loans, has managed to institutionalize corruption and graft, where lavish weddings are held in places like the Abahani football field or the Chittagong Stadium, cannot find the

measly resources to cover the travel costs of a dozen minors?

It appears that the GOB was able to scrounge enough to cover the repatriation costs for only four boys! I wonder if the princely amount involved (may be Tk. 20,000 at most?) had to be obtained from a denor grant? In the meantime, what were the media and civic society doing? Was this just a minor event unworthy of their attention? Or is this perhaps just another sorry story deplorable of course - but

Those twelve little boys

what's to be done?

(and their families) have been deprived of their birth rights. The boys - the twelve little "aliens" (because that is what they have now become culturally, if not politically), have retaliated in the only way that they could. They have turned against their country of birth, forgetting their language and culture. Or perhaps they just wish to turn their backs on us. and one could scarcely fault them for it. The fate of these twelve reflect a much wider malaise our abject loss of self-respect. For why else do we choose to turn a blind eve to the fact that there are

Bangladeshis in India, e.g. in the slums of Bombay and Delhi? Is it not far better to accept reality and then begin to tackle the root of the problem? Rejecting reality leads to even greater suffering of our people, for example when they get stranded on no man's land

There certainly may be, indeed are, mistakes on both sides of the border - but the fact remains that we have chosen to remain politically blind to certain demographic movements. I have myself encountered women in the villages of Khulna during field work, who have lived and worked in Delhi and escaped back to their villages when the local police got tough. If thousands of heads of cattle can come to graze from across the border effortlessly, should trans-border movement of human chattel surprise anyone?

How many times have we read in the papers about the plight of Bangladeshi women sold into slavery and prostitution in Pakistan? And yet this 'no action' government has decided to ignore their plight. Nothing short of a massive campaign is required to stop this trade once and

The administration had

also fielded Mr Bruce O

other things, national honour is at stake. It is late, but not too late for action. Let us launch a full-scale campaign to prevent human trafficking. Let us relentlessly hunt out the criminals and their masters. Let us tell the world that we are 120 million proud souls and we will not have our women and children abused in alien lands. Let us bring back our women, our children, our "illegal" aliens. Let us tell foreign governments, not all of whom adhere to civilized norms of behaviour, that they should not maltreat our nationals. Let us not sell our pride for a few dirhams or our souls for a few pieces of silver.

for all - because amongst

Post-script

Since writing this piece. the threat of the Pakistani government to deport a million Bengalis (Bangladeshis?) appears to be in the process of being translated into reality. Another potential human disaster looms large on the horizon. The government should waste no time, and press ahead with every means at its disposal to prevent another outrage. The government of Pakistan must be persuaded to abide by civilized norms of behaviour.

Dr Murshid is a Senior Research Fellow at BIDS. He bears full responsibility for the views expressed in this

Strains on Indian Security

HE Prime Minister of India has now spoken merely to say that the Hank-Brown amendment "would lead to an arms race in the sub-continent". This is not new nor would it be unwelcome to the cause of major arms suppliers in the

It would be a folly not to fully comprehend a vital turn in the American policy that adversely affects our security.

Ms Raphel, Assistant Secretary of State, minced no words while informing the Senate Committee, "Pakistan has been a valuable friend and ally of the United States for nearly five decades..." that has helped Washington "for moderation in the troubled part of world where religious extremism can threaten stability in the region and beyond..." While she appreciated Pakistan's contribution during the Afghan War, she was worried that presently both India and Pakistan are "competing for influence (in Iran)." In her assessment, "...Pakistan has strategic and cultural reasons for wanting to play a constructive role in Central Asia (and) as a moderate Islamic State. Pakistan is often seen as an alternative model to Iran in Central Asia..", while "India is particularly interested in developing a land transport corridor through Iran to the Central Asian States and Russia..." This, of course, does not tally with American interests.

Despite end of the Cold

War and collapse of the USSR, the American Administration worries about the prospects of Indo-Russian relations. She told the Committee, "...any Russian resumption of exports of nuclear power reactors or missile related equipment and technology to India would be of concern (to USA)..." So, "...In 1992 we applied economic sanctions to the Russian space agency Glavkosmos for the export of rocket engine technology to India. We have since reached agreement with Russia on an arrangement under which Russia terminated the transfer of technology in rocket engine deal and we lifted the sanc-

tions on Russia..." She further informed the Committee: "...We have continued regular discussions of non-proliferation in South Asia with Russia, which shares many of our concerns. (And) Russia's imminent membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime is another disincentive for it to provide missile related assistance to India..". This, it will be seen, is contrary to what the Government of India has been saying regarding supply of the cryogenic engines. The Assistant Secretary of

State had no objection to "Pakistan's traditionally close relationship with China (that) remains strong, despite the gradual rapprochement between China and India. Pakistan particularly values its Chinese ties as a source of

I K Gujral writes from New Delhi

both moral and material support..." She added, "...our concern with aspects of (this) bilateral security relationship are well known; they involve Chinese support for Pakistan's nuclear programme, as well as the missile related items...(this) action prompted our imposition of Category II sanctions on both countries in 1993... Ali the same, Pakistan has already received the M 11 missiles and so has Iran.

Senator Pressler bemoaned the end of his efforts to stop nuclear proliferation. He made a last ditch effort and informed the Committee that

(i) "...Majority leader Bob Dole, (had) told the American legion that China is arming Pakistan with nuclear missiles. The question before us is whether we also will arm Pakistan?

(ii) "...the McGrow-Hill news letter "Nuclear Fuel" disclosed that Pakistan, in 1991, sought to violate a joint venture with a German Company by diverting telecommunications equipment to its Nuclear Weapon Programme..'

(iii) "... Last week, the Commander of the Iranian Navy announced it would hold another round of joint naval maneuvers with Pakistan later this year — the latest chapter in a sustained military relationship between Pakistan and her terroristcoddling neighbour to the

And all this at a time when (said Pressler), : .. "our hearts and our prayers are with friends and family of our lellow American Doval Hutchings and the three others who have been held captive for ten weeks by brutal terrorists in Kashmir."

Not that Senator Pressler was opposed to helping Pakistani economy. He was worried about possible nuclearisation of the South Asia. He, therefore, asked Senator Brown and his Committee to take such steps as would ...put South Asia on the path towards a nuclear arms build down to zero." And for this he suggested convening of a "US-led multilateral summit designated to reduce the presence of nuclear weapons in South Asia." He wanted that "Pakistan should provide verifiable written guarantees that it has capped its nuclear programme and that any future US assistance would not be used to further its nuclear programme and nuclear delivery programme." And that "Pakistan should provide written guarantees that no military or civilian official will provide assistance that furthers the military or nuclear programmes of a terrorist

country (meaning Iran). But all this to no avail despite Pressler saying, "Let us give Pakistan some concrete incentives to honour its word. Let us not reward proliferation.

Riedel, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, who submitted: "Though India has a quantitative (and qualitative) advantage in personnel and most categories of equipment.. Indian military's manpower intensive internal security responsibilities, both in Kashmir and in India's Northeast, would serve to reduce these advantages...". He concluded,".. despite its numerical advantages, it is most unlikely that India could win a decisive victory over Pakistan in a conventional war In fact, we believe that both sides, given favourable circumstances, could win "local" victories on the ground." And for several other reasons that he recounted, he added ...coupled with its more developed industrial capacity and greater geographic expanse that provides strategic depth not available to the smaller Pakistan, India could fight a longer war than Pakistan — thus a longer war would favour India..." This is, it may be safe to conclude. what the Clinton regime seeks to neutralise.

for the 'waiver', was forced to confess that Pakistan had never explicitly ensured USA that it would not "develop nuclear weapons in return for cooperation in the 80s..." In the Cold War "one of the major fronts (for USA) was with the Soviet Union Afghanistan. A very important and, in fact, crucial ally for us

in that whole operation was, of course, Pakistan. So the need to bolster Pakistan. which was taking very real risks in the Cold War struggle. Now, at the same time, we were engaged in an effort to persuade Pakistan not to go down the nuclear path. But there was no explicit quid pro quo there..."

Her statement hides more than it reveals. A shrewd Gen Zia fully encashed the opportunity. As his senior aides of the time and others who occupied high positions, have now said, "...Pakistan had agreed to pull the American chestnuts out of the blazing fire only when it agreed not to disturb its nuclear programme and also not to talk of its democratisation. Presidents - Reagan and Bush, had therefore no compunction in falsely certifying to the Congress regarding Islamabad's nuclear chastity. Only when the Afghan war had been won and the USSR was destroyed that President Bush's conscience was roused and he refused to issue a certificate to impose the rigors of the Pressler law.

Some newspapers have Ms Raphel, while asking said that USA is now mobilis ing the P-8 — that includes Russia, besides the rich seven nations to demand that India signs NPT.

This irony has made me write to the Prime Minister asking him to take the Parliament in confidence regarding credibility of our security in the vitally changed circumstances.

Brain museum!

Sir. Brains of extraordinary Japanese this century had and now preserved at a Japanese university symbolise the contributions of the talents that pioneered the continuing terrestrial progress.

Amazing enough, only a few human brains of genius caliber are known to have been behind the evolution and advances of this civiliza-

tion. It is the brain that starts and stops the individual's actions, stores own memory, controls physiological systems, and visualizes something beyond present.

No surprising though, that the computer's memory and output capacities have terribly outdone the super-brain that invented it will be making lot of senses everywhere in the process of advancing civility in the expanding uni-

The fact that the superbrain capabilities created technologies available to date will be leading the subsequent generations toward unending experiments for better-than-the-present realities including functional condition of the involved brain itself.

Unlike curable dysfunction, a brain-dead human may stay barely alive for a long time but remains unproductive, which implies the strength of brain-power as long as any system of the physique is uninfected.

But, as always regrettable world-over, the agony of damage caused by the false reading or error in the diagnostic process sometimes

expose what can be referred to as the worse-than-fatal blow to the person (patient) concerned.

M Rahman Zila School Road Mymensingh 2200.

Some comments

Sir, Thanks to M G Quibria for his very timely warning (through your esteemed daily recently) what the failure to resolve the prevailing political deadlock would mean to the economy of Bangladesh. The economic gains achieved in' different areas over the last decade is not inconsiderable. However, it is necessary to consolidate and build upon these gains if Bangladesh is to emerge as a dynamic and vibrant nation in the 21st century. An essential precondition for this is a stable political environment. Verily, we are at the crossroads of political and economic development. Failure to act judiciously now would imperil the future of both our nascent democracy and fragile economy. Both need to be nurtured in a mutually reinforcing fashion as one complements the other in the quest for sustainable development.

It is difficult to believe that our political leaders are unaware of this reality. An act of concession from one and/or compromise from both the parties can definitely contribute towards resolving the current political crisis. Why is it not forthcoming, then? Is it a matter of ego on the part of the two leaders or pressure from the hardliners within each party

which the leaders are unable

to withstand? But, as Mr Quibria rightly pointed out, what is considered as weakness or compromise by diehard supporters is often viewed as magnanimity by vast majority of non-partisan general public and eventually rewarded by greater electoral votes in the election. The sooner our political leaders realise this the better it is for the nation. In the meantime. of course, the laudable efforts of the civil society and the vocal business community should continue and if necessary, intensified.

Quazi Shahabuddin Senior Research Fellow BIDS, Dhaka.

Dubbed BTV movies Sir, It is an august feeling to know M Zahidul Haque had the rare vision that prompted him to "ask a number of common viewers for their opinion and they opined they now understand the exact story of the movies (letter dated 5.11.95) "Time Trax" and "Dark Justice." However, while the viewers who have registered their disgust regarding the dubbing of the English movies into Bangla turned out to be more, than those who opted for it, reference BTV's 3.11.95 programme, a weekly one based on viewers' response - perhaps he simply did not bother to watch the programme as it happened to be a local one. It is irregular on his part not to have mentioned who his "Common Viewers" are. M Zahidul organisation.

Haque's remark "viewers,

who love to watch English

movies with original dia-

logues, the BTV is regularly screening a number of English social movies plus documentaries" is in bad taste indeed. Lastly, but not in the least, he forgot to give. express or make it plain what is his own opinion regarding the dubbing of these two English movies into Bangla. It is sickly for someone who enjoys reading and writing English....

Nahtasha Kamal Wari, Dhaka.

NCTB and authors

Sir, In the continuous

process of development of the standard of textbooks, National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) recently enlisted the authors through advertisement in the newspapers. For each subject of each class, from class six to twelve, selected authors have been formed into groups and asked to prepare manuscripts within about two months. The authors with much pain and toil did it with a zeal to help the organisation and the nation as well The manuscripts (four in number on each subject of each class) have been evaluated and the best ones are selected for publication finally as textbooks from the

next academic session. The NCTB is an apex body responsible for the development of school texts, dedicated for the well-being of education in this country and certainly is not a profiteering

Textbook development entails curriculum device, manuscript writing, material

production etc. Of these steps, manuscript preparation for the children is of paramount importance and presentation of curricular topics in it is an art of excellence, which, if not properly presented, may baffle the entire efforts for the intention of quality improvement of the

It is learnt that the Board authority is going to pay the text writers very poorly, which, if it is true, will certainly be detrimental to the efforts of the only national publishing house itself for the production of quality texts in the future and discouraging for the writers who can produce quality materials and will indulge in writing notes and guides which will bring

them prospect.

The NCTB having monopoly in text publication produces about 90 million books each year on different subjects for different grades. For a new publication, the number of books in Bengali, English, Maths, Social Studies, Integrated General Science (commerce and humanities groups). Science books can easily be guessed. For example, the book on general science for grade six (for one year course) will have about half a million copies and if the selling price is Tk 30 each piece, one can easily realise the business involved in it. The book will continue to be the text for

eight to 10 years. In all countries, authors are given at least 10 per cent royalty or its equivalent NCTB does not allow royalty and it offers lump sum to the authors. But if this amount is

not reasonable, then the genuine authors will not come forward to help the organisation. So we appeal to the authorities concerned to look into the matter for the welfare of the authors and and reconsider for enhancement of the payment of honourarium to the authors con-

cerned

On terrorists

Sir, I would like to specially thank your correspondent Nurul Alam and of course, The Daily Star, for the article which appeared on 18th August about the terrorists of northern parts of Chittagong district, especially of Raozan, Fatikchari and Rangunia thanas.

Haorapara, under Raozan thana is my birthplace. I think it was a bold step to write against the terrorist activities there. It is horrifying to think that even school boys walk around carrying arms. So, one can imagine the situation of those places. Ordinary people do not dare to say anything to them.

I know that many families of my village has shifted to the city who have little money and many others on the way to move. But people want to live in peace at their own places. So I appeal to The Daily Star to write more about the terrorists, so that the authority concerned come forward to take necessary steps.

Debashish Banua Bashabo, Dhaka