

## Compelling Timetable

The PM's proposal that an interim national government be formed through the instrumentality of by-elections has met with a prompt opposition disapproval. Closely on the heels of the Election Commission's formal announcement of the schedule for by-polls, the opposition has made it clear that they would boycott and resist the same. Perhaps as a foretaste of things to come, the very declaration of the by-election plans triggered a violent reaction among some Awami League activists who went on a rampage along the Bangabandhu Avenue on Wednesday. As it is, Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina has warned the government of a tougher agitation from December 7, if it fails by that date to meet the opposition demand for a non-partisan caretaker government to oversee the general elections.

The ruling party sources suggest that the government is not keen on the by-elections and the announcement of the schedule for these has been merely to meet a formality. The Prime Minister has herself said that if the opposition political parties stay away from the by-polls she would request the President to dissolve the parliament in which case obviously the process of general elections will get into motion. In such a scenario the PM is likely to seek the dissolution of parliament in the first week of December, well in time to avoid the complexity of undergoing the by-polls on December 15, so close to the mandatory date for the general elections.

So, anyone keeping the calendar of electoral events handy is at a loss to find any immediate justification for a toughened agitation by the opposition against a government going through a lame duck period before calling the fresh elections. And it is to the interest of all political parties that they reach a prior understanding on the ways to hold the next parliamentary elections.

One way of going about this would have been to pursue the five plus five formula in the light of BNP's readiness to talk about a non-partisan head for the caretaker government. The by-elections would have had a specified limited objective to fulfil as distinguished from that of reviving the old parliament the opposition is justifiably allergic to.

If it is a headlong plunge for the general elections, so be it. But in that event, the need for a dialogue would be even greater for the wide-ranging issues involved. The opposition should sit for a dialogue with the BNP to test the genuineness of the latter's last round of conciliatory gestures.

## Shibir's Wrath

Following the arrest of 37 Shibir activists at the time of their failed attempt to capture two Jahangirnagar University Halls, there has been a reign of terror on the Dhaka-Aricha highway. Buses carrying students of the JU have come under attack. Lately, included in the hit list have been vehicles carrying teachers of that university. On Tuesday it was a close call for some teachers travelling by two hired buses. Cadres of both the Jamaat and Shibir — many of them armed — allegedly tried to carry on their attack at Amin Bazar. Thanks to police intervention, the teachers were unharmed.

Now two things are noticeable here: the Shibir activists are joined by their elders and together they are flexing their muscles. Their failure to capture the JU halls making them desperate, they have been resorting to hit-and-run attacks. The kind of political stronghold they could build on Chittagong University and Rajshahi University campuses is non-existent here. So they might have thought it politically expedient to resort to terrorist tactic. The Shibir demands that their arrested colleagues be released.

The law enforcing agency should keep a strict vigil on the Shibir's new aggressiveness and strongly deal with the offenders. Unless a sharp and ruthless response is evolved to meet the threat coming from the Shibir goons, either a tragic prospect looms large or the all-party students will look for weapons to cope with the challenge. Neither is desirable. Let the authorities take actions before the trouble spills further.

## Why Fatwa Again?

It seems the suicide committed by Nurjahan of Chhatakchhara has left no lesson for the people there. Kamalganj thana under which Chhatakchhara comes, has made another sensational piece of news. This time Fajira Bibi has incurred the wrath of the village *Fatwabaz*. The charge against her is deviation from social norms and rules — a vague one at that and obviously refuted by Fajira — and so she might be punished with 41 lashes.

The social sanction was manoeuvred three years ago at the instigation of a *moulana* called Jamiruddin. In the face of stiff opposition by villagers the infamous verdict could not take effect then. The *fatwa*-wielders, however, succeeded in forcing Fajira to live separately from her husband for about eight months.

The middle-aged woman has sought her life's security in a written complaint addressed to the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) and the OC of Kamalganj. However, no action has been taken against the *fatwabaz*. Why? Can't our local administration move into action before it is too late? Pronouncement of *fatwa* is a crime and if a would-be victim lodges a complaint, the thana administration must rush to the place of occurrence. Such prompt and decisive actions, with a manifest social commitment, would act as a deterrent against *fatwabazi*.

# A Lonely Battle in Assam

**AASU took up the issue with the Chief Election Commissioner, who ordered in 1994 an intensive checking of the electoral rolls. District magistrates and other officials were able to cancel 30 lakh votes... But on a petition, the state high court nullified the procedure. All the 30 lakh names were put back on the voting list**

the 50s and 60s, even when some of them lived in the then East Pakistan. Congress kept their name on the voters' list and brought them at the time of the polling.

Still, many found even the not-too-good economic conditions in Assam better than those obtaining in their own country. Assam found in them cheap and productive labour. They settled in border districts by the thousands. Today they constitute nearly 40 per cent of the state's population.

In Tripura, the immigration has created more havoc. The entire complexion of the population has changed. The two-thirds, who rule, are from across the border. Original inhabitants have been driven out of their lands, habitations and jobs.

The All Assam Students Union (AASU), which has been the first to take up the issue, has been sensitive enough to keep it away from the religious divide. It has considered a foreigner a foreigner.

The AASU launched an agitation in the early 70s to effect a stricter check on borders to stop the Bangladeshis from crossing into Assam. At the same time, it asked the government to disenfranchise them. A long, protracted agitation ended in 1985 when the then prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, signed an accord with the AASU, agreeing to 1966 as the cut-off date for citizen-

ship. That is, all those who came from the other side before that year were taken as Indians. Again, those who arrived up to March 1971 could stay in the state but they would not be eligible to vote for 10 years. The rest were to be treated as foreigners and ousted from the state.

Bangladesh refused to take them back on the plea that they were not its citizens. No state in India agreed, despite New Delhi's request, to reha-

the application. The onus of proof is on the complaining citizen. The conditions have been found too exacting.

The return of Congress in the state in 1990 sealed the fate of the accord. While in the opposition, Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia assailed the AGP government for not turning out illegal immigrants. Now his stand is that there are no foreigners in the state. He realises how important they are if he wants to come back.

does not want to implement the accord. Hence most Assamese nourish a grievance against the Centre. Some have taken to the gun.

The new crop of students, who now represents the AASU, took up the issue with the Chief Election Commissioner, who ordered in 1994 an intensive checking of the electoral rolls. District magistrates and other officials — with 40 observers from the Centre — were able to cancel 30 lakh votes.

But on a petition, the state high court nullified the procedure. All the 30 lakh names were put back on the voting list. Significantly, the then acting chief justice, Mani Sana Singh, who gave the judgement on his last working day, was next day appointed by the Saikia government as the state's Lokayukt (ombudsman). The chief election commissioner issued fresh orders in 1995 for the revision of rolls. The high court heard the matter in January but has reserved the judgement.

In the meanwhile, identity cards have begun to be issued, without making any distinction between the Assamese and foreigners. The AASU has again started a statewide protest. But the government is using all methods to crush the agitation. The chief minister has harnessed even the support of SULFA (Surrendered United Liberation Front of Assam). He also has all the

tainted money to spend. No political party has come to AASU's rescue because no one wants to risk the vote of immigrants. The AASU helplessly looks towards the election commission for intervention.

Student bodies in other parts of the northeast are following the developments closely. They too have a large number of illegal immigrants in their midst. The Naga students have threatened that if the government does not do anything, they will turn out foreigners on their own. The elected representatives of all political parties in Arunachal Pradesh have given an ultimatum to New Delhi that they would resign en bloc on December 31 if, by then, the Centre does not take steps to oust foreigners.

The potential for nastiness is apparent. If New Delhi does not wake up to the dangers the illegal immigrants pose in the northeast, the nation is in for a serious trouble. The economic development of the area would have increased the avenues of employment and business and it would have lessened the pressure on the locals. But New Delhi's neglect of border states has made them edgy and unaccommodating. They believe that they have to wage a struggle for their survival.

It is a lonely battle for the AASU. But it is worth fighting for. All it has to ensure is that the issue does not get mixed with religion or acquires an anti-Bengali edge. Some time even Biharis and Marwaris are treated as foreigners. The AASU has to guard itself against it because then it loses sympathy in the rest of the country.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

biliterate some of them. They have no place to go. Assam is stuck with them. When the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a political party which grew out of the AASU, came to power, it got entangled in procedures. It could turn out only 1,200 people during a rule of nearly four years.

The government's main handicap was the Assam Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983 — IMDT Act. It lays down that no application is admissible unless it is filed by a person who resides within the jurisdiction of the police station where the alleged immigrant lives. Two persons in the same area have to attest

"Why was the cut-off date in Assam accord never implemented?" I asked him some time back. "This is a political question," he said. "You should ask the Centre about it." The home ministry recognises the validity of allegation that lakhs of illegal entrants are on the electoral rolls. But how can it afford to forego the votes which will tilt the balance in favour of Congress?

As many as 68 assembly seats out of the total of 122 are dependent on the foreigners' option. Like the Assamese Hindus, the Assamese Muslims feel exasperated over the situation. But both are helpless since Congress

# Governing by Crisis Proves the Mettle of Leadership

by Md Asadullah Khan

**Historical records are galore with instances where great leaders imbued with statesmanship and pragmatism played very crucial role to set the records straight and saved their country from ignominy.**

MINOUS crises of mythic proportions have taken hold over the country breaking down hopes and aspirations of people. Foremost among them is the simmering political crisis. The administration, leaders of the political parties and their operators do not act on the basis of rational discussion and orderly action. The rule of reason or a consensus seems to be an illusion. All these beautiful jargons continue to be the guiding spirit in the pages of newspapers, public speeches of the leaders and neatly arranged seminars. People and government are swept away by events that are uncontrollable and that push the country to the brink of an impending disaster.

Battered by successive floods that have resulted into heavy crop-losses, the northern parts of the country, namely, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Rajshahi are still boiling at their seams. Post-flood recovery in these regions has not proceeded in the way it demanded. People in these areas are selling the just harvested Aman paddy at 240/- per maund, an awfully low price to meet the production cost. On the other hand, the force of events, mostly disastrous, taking shape at a break-neck speed, has led the government to make up policy by the hour, day and week. People running the statecraft seem to be sailing a boat that won't capsize. They look quite calm in the face of

all the dark clouds hovering over the horizon. Admittedly, there is a crisis in the country and it is only deepening day by day. Precisely speaking, the crises are perilous.

They shatter old assumptions and reveal new truths. People are forced to do things that they would prefer not to do or had never before considered to. That is exactly the situation facing the leaders of the political parties today.

Shockingly, people are prompted to say what the chaos during and aftermath of the liberation war could not destroy, democracy did. BBC TV portrayal of the Dhaka city during the hartal days makes a poignant show. Shops with shutters down, vehicular traffic off the wide paved roads and police beating the processionists and picketers do in no way boost the image of a troubled country, already ravaged by flood and fertilizer crisis. The country has begun to look dangerously anti-selves with debts deepening, revenues inadequate, services falling apart, people sleeping in the streets, crime and drugs creating their elaborate and permanent reality and lastly, most vicious of all, academic institutions totally non-functional. In a word, a sinking feeling has got over the

whole nation.

But leadership in such a paramount crisis is a super-human quality that must be called in to play. There is no second thought or a shadow of doubt about the fact that almost all crises are consequences of blunders we have committed earlier. People have raised their voices for a caretaker government during the next parliamentary election, rather outraged by a bitter memory of Magura by-election. There comes the necessity of grasping the future implications of present events, and forestall any likely catastrophe.

Historical records are galore with instances where great leaders imbued with statesmanship and pragmatism played very crucial role to set the records straight and saved their country from ignominy. Looking back to America in this century, we can see that Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D Roosevelt, Truman and Bush, the past presidents, owe their reputations to crisis leadership.

Churchill, the war-time Prime Minister of Britain would not have become that great unless he acted as events of World War II demanded of him. By the same analogy, many leaders have been destroyed by crises, de-

spite other accomplishments. L.B Johnson was devalued by Vietnam war, Carter by Iranian hostage crisis and Nixon by Watergate scandal, Hitler for unleashing the holocaust, and Stalin and Khrushchev for perpetrating an oppressive socialist regime.

At the moment, in the country, the ruling party and the opposition parties are caught in a crisis of unusual dimension with the possibility of either revitalising them or hastening their gloom. And because a crisis offers an opportunity to do normally impossible things, the potential for big gains or errors must be there. Still we have to act and our actions must always be backed by rational considerations, welfare of the masses and a look to the future. Precisely known to all, every crisis is automatically exploited by political groups for their own interests and purposes. So there is reason to be cautious.

Musing over the worsening scenario developing with each passing day in the country, one is prompted to think that the power of reason and sensibility and taking a realistic appraisal of the situation palls before the power of events. Increasingly, the country has to look inward, obsessed with its economic

slow-down, and a spectre of about 20 lakh Bangladeshi-Pakistanis likely to be repatriated to Bangladesh any time after about 30 years of their stay in Pakistan, the daunting problems of staving off food-shortages of about 39 lakh tons after the devastating flood and drought in the northern region of the country. Along with this, under the circumstances, there might crop up a fear of peasants' agitation that could rip apart the country's social fabric. And in such a delicate situation, leadership appears to be failing.

Hopes for early reconciliation of the festering prob-

lems of internal differences and feuds seem to be glimmering away. But people's expectation runs high, urging the country's leaders to face their historic responsibilities and re-make their relationship that holds the country unified in the face of disastrous extremist movements and anti-liberation forces that loom up ominously. And that needs leaders, imbued with pragmatism, statesmanship and vision. If the rot does not stop soon, the ghoules and ghosts of the country's troubled past will have won the day. The country, still reeling from the damages and shortfall of agricultural output and production losses in the industrial sector, after all, heading towards an uncertain future. So, leadership must act, and act now and in the right direction.

## OPINION

### Post-Beijing Idle Thoughts

Abdul Kader

IN the backdrop of worldwide 'abuse' of women folk, I am delighted to know that the women's conference held at Beijing under the auspices of the UN had been a great success. Indeed, the grand conference representing half of the world population had rightly asserted that "a revolution has begun" and that "there is no going back!" Whether the world's first woman was created out of an extra lefthand side male rib or actually dropped from the 'Heaven' in complete shape of a damsel may be a matter of mythological thinking, yet the fact remains that "a woman belongs to father in her childhood, to husband in her youth and to her son (or daughter) in old age." According to this theory, propounded by Manu, a woman is never independent and invariably needs support at every stage of life. But such a situation, for that matter a subordinate status of women, could not be a healthy sign for the progress of human society. If God has created men and women "to live in peace and harmony" then a policy of 50:50 seems to be a more reasonable way of fulfilling the purpose of God.

But the irony is that men and women of today have conveniently forgotten the above quoted religious injunction, particularly as mentioned in the Holy Quran. The free-style movement of the two different sexes have caused an undesirable 'polarisation' of men and women. The women-folk have genuine reasons to be annoyed with their male counterpart. When Bosnian women were violated did any of the mother's sons (there must be onlookers there) asked the beastly Serbians: "Have you no mothers and sisters or daughters at home?" It is a fact that all women are not equal as all men are not equal. But the fact remains that "Wives are

young men's mistresses, companions for the middle-aged, and old men's nurses." At least this is how Francis Bacon looked at the relationship between men and women. Surely, men are born in the womb of mothers and remain under their care and hospitality for a certain period of time. And a man is again handed over to a woman to look after him in his youth and old age. There is no denying the fact that a woman shoulders more mundane responsibilities than a man does. The women-folk serve men-folk with all tenderness.

Yet, one may ponder as to why women are deprived of their right to children who are fruits of their 10-month-old toil and sufferings at the risk of their lives. One story goes that a cynic used to write 'goodum bhara' (rent for hiring a godown) in his personal account book after sending a money order to his mother every month! He thought it fit to write so just because for long ten months he was inside the womb of his mother. Utmost gratitude indeed!

Besides being a widower I am also an old man and as such in a right position to weigh the actual worth of a woman — be she grannie, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law or wife. My experiences show that the company of a deserving woman is a matter of joy forever and sweeter than any other thing. They are objects of sincere love and respect and even adoration! In the context of our society, women have a real responsibility to discharge in ridding the society of corruption. As no government in our country has ever tried to improve the law and order situation, so it may be that none of our women will ever ask her husband: "Where from you got this extra money beyond your salary?" Can they make it a slogan after their Beijing's?

## To the Editor...

### WASA water supply

Sir, WASA water supply at New Eskatan-Maghabazar area continues to deteriorate with time during the past three months while more and more multistoried buildings, are coming up in this locality. The WASA water connections in those newly built multistories are composed of large diameter pipes and thus older residential houses with smaller diameter pipes, are deprived of enough water.

The great water crisis in 1986 was solved partially through installation of a deep tubewell near Hafizabad colony but this tubewell has lost efficiency in view of water layer problem and water raising capacity has been reduced to almost half or less. The Prime Minister Khaleda Zia got elected from this constituency in 1991 Jatiya Sangsad election while today a sitting minister is the JS member of this locality. Everyday WASA water carrying transport vehicles supply water to many a houses regularly.

The Deputy Leader of the House often utters bright prospects in respect of medical care, health and hygiene boost up, prosperity to every Bangladeshi etc. by the year 2000 AD at all public meetings or so. Under the above backdrop it would be justified if BNP leaders guarantee towards the supply of a few pails of safe water to Dhaka

residents while the poor mofussol Bangladeshis have to pray to Almighty for water through rain, thunderstorm and if not show or so. Let the authority look into the problem seriously before it is too late!

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### Why we write

Sir, When asked by the French newspaper, 'Liberation' during their special supplement in 1985, as to why you write, the best response was, "Because its worth the trouble".

We single-mindedly pursue the adventures with English language for literary work and being imbued with national feelings, without being mindful of incentives like the classic Freudian trio — money, fame and love of beautiful women.

We would, therefore, request that:

Our worthwhile writings get due considerations in your esteemed dailies either as 'letter to editor' or as feature article at appropriate page.

You arrange for the return or collection of the ones not entertained — in most cases being the only copies.

Recognise our efforts as writers for your paper by calling our representatives for regular discussions etc. during your special

briefing or functions. These were the points that came up for discussion during our regular get-together meeting, last held on the 6 October, '95.

Col Mirza Shaif (rtd)  
President  
Letter Writers' Forum

### New Agricultural University

Sir, One of your letter writers has requested the Prime Minister to declare the half century old Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (Agricultural College) into a Monofaculty Agricultural University. The upgradation of Jagannath College into a University has made the college campus more vocal.

Jagannath College is a century old college and has got a long tradition and history. This college has produced many worthy citizens, bureaucrats and scholars etc. It would have been more wise to setup the Jagannath University somewhere outside Dhaka keeping the old college running as "it is". During the period of Late Ayub Khan, the then President wanted to shift the Dhaka University from the mainstream of the town. Later on he could not do it. A new University was opened at Savar which is now Jahangirnagar University. Dinajpur which is mainly

known for agricultural crop has got a Government Agricultural College. This college can be upgraded into a fullfledged University.

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### Promotion

Sir, Nearly a month and a half is over, a little over two hundred officers were promoted to the rank of Deputy Secretary, Joint Secretary and Additional Secretary. Before the promotions were made, government gave an impression that this time promotions would be made on the basis of vacancies and officers would not be kept sitting idle. But that was not to be. Till today, many newly promoted officers are found roaming in the corridors of Ministry of Establishment for posting.

There is no set policy, no career planning, no consideration of merit and seniority while postings are being made. Two factors have been found to be dominant while making posting. These are "illegal graft" and "Tadbir". A scrutiny of the posting list and the past background and performance of the promoted officers may perhaps testify to this. Will the authority look into it?

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