

Khaleda-Hasina Talks Imperative

The dissolution of the Parliament by the President, on the advice of the Prime Minister, has set the election clock ticking. All parties will have to do whatever they want, within the time-frame permitted by the Constitution.

The question that we must face now is what are the options available to us to fulfil that goal. The opposition has been insisting on a neutral caretaker government to oversee the elections.

The option that remains is the holding of the election under the rule of the President, within the provision of the "doctrine of necessity."

For the elections to be conducted by the President, we need the understanding of the ruling party and the opposition. The PM will have to agree to relinquish power, which she had promised repeatedly.

Sheikh Hasina's letter, followed by the surprise phone call of last Sunday shows some renewed sense of urgency and conciliation, which the ruling party should not ignore.

The rhetoric aside, there can be no better way of electing a new government than going to the polls. An understanding between BNP and AL will energise the nation and enthuse the people to partake in the elections.

A Cheery Visit

Past the half-way mark of their probing seven-day visit to Bangladesh, the 37-member British trade, infrastructure and technology delegation must have had by now some well-formed impressions of where they might like to strengthen their partnership with us.

Their visit has been quite cheery for us taking place as it does in a rather difficult political situation here. It is also noteworthy that it coincides with a boom both sides are experiencing in their bilateral trade and follows a British perception of Bangladesh's huge potential for the next ten years to attract foreign investments.

Fresh elections are in the offing in Bangladesh. Given the serious stake all the political parties have in these, it is reasonable to hope that they would soon strike a deal to ensure their fullest participation in the polls.

The prospects for networking with Bangladesh as underlined by the British trade mission chief Peter Lee holds a lot of meaning for us as there ought to be substantial fund-raising to make the needed investments possible in Bangladesh.

The British entrepreneurs' attention is drawn to the good promise we hold out as a springboard for their marketing drive beyond this country, let alone a sizable market they can find in Bangladesh itself for their products and services generated here.

Let sky be the limit for British-Bangla collaboration.

Neglect at Mongla

A Panamanian ship sank in the Mongla Port channel in July, 1994. The problem was compounded when two cement-loaded barges also sank alongside choking the passage through the channel.

A Dhaka firm was awarded the contract for removing the vessels and clearing the channel. The job had to be completed by August this year. It is far from complete three months after that deadline.

Nothing about Mongla moves the administration. Perhaps regional predominance of the state's political and executive power and entrenched vested interest can explain this.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: Farewell to Arms

As the grim-faced three leaders signed the Agreement and President Clinton announced the news before the TV cameras, there was no euphoria like it was when he had announced the Palestine-Israel agreement two years ago.

THE signing of the Agreement between the three parties of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the Wright Patterson Airbase in Dayton, Ohio, USA, rings down the curtain on warfare and opens the prospects of peace.

This spectacular result was achieved after three weeks of tough bargaining by the adversaries under the prodding of US and personally by President Bill Clinton, who appeared to have put the authority of his high office on the line.

The Agreement stipulates: 1) Division of the territory along the old formula of 51% to the Muslim-Croat Federation and 49% to the Serbs; 2) A single federal State with one President, a bicameral legislature, a constitutional court and a single currency.

3) Withdrawal of all troops within 30 days of the final signing of the Agreement. The vacuum will be filled by 60000 NATO troops of which 20000 US and 3000 Russian under their own command;

4) Sarajevo will be the unified Muslim-Croat capital and remain open to all citizens. Gorazde will be linked with Sarajevo with a secure corridor. On the other hand the status of Brko, currently under Muslim control, will be determined by arbitration within one year;

5) No indicted War Criminal will be allowed to hold office in New Bosnia.

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And what did the Muslims do to deserve this fate? Orthodox Serbs have for centuries been fed on childhood tales of 'atrocities' perpetrated by the successors of Ottoman Sultan Fatih Mehmet, who conquered Bosnia in 1463, exactly ten years after the conquest of Istanbul.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

Its to former Yugoslavia, I have been often struck by this anti-Turkish syndrome among the Yugoslavs. In the immediate past there has been great resistance by the Serbs to the inclusion of Turkish forces in the UNPROFOR. Bosnia has nurtured

Ottoman symbols while integrating fully within the former Yugoslavia, which was such a vibrant and modern state under the patriotic leadership of Josip Broz Tito. Now Mostar bridge built by that master architect Sinan of the reign of Sultan Suley-

man the Magnificent lies in ruins. Hounded by the Serbs, Bosnian Muslims have made Turkey their home of first choice. There are nearly three million Bosnians in Turkey that is more than the population of Bosnia.

If the Agreement will be welcomed in Turkey, the entire Islamic world will have a sign of collective relief. No more switching off the TV because the pictures of Serbian brutalities were too much to behold. No single recent event has held one billion Muslims spellbound like the events in Bosnia. The expression double standard of the West became very common. The 55 nation OIC has operated through its Contact Group and its members have willingly sent troops under UNPROFOR. Bangladesh sent 1250 troops and manned valiantly Bihać against Serbian threats. Bangladesh is a member of the recently created Assistance Mobilization Group for Bosnia within the OIC. It may be recalled that during an important meeting sponsored by UK last July in London, Bangladesh was the solitary OIC member invited to attend.

In retrospect what appears to have turned the tables was the total involvement of sole Superpower US in this Balkan conflict. The European Union appeared powerless to act collectively as the Serbs continued their

murderous spree. Last summer President Suleyman Demirel paid a visit to President Tudjman and the meeting was reported to have gone on very well. The alliance between the Muslims of Bosnia and Croats was born. That alliance remains intact today. The immediate beneficiary was the Croats, who reconquered Krajina from the Serbs. On the battlefield Serbs started facing reverses for the first time. On the diplomatic front except for Russia nobody really stood openly by their side.

The Final Agreement is due to be signed in Paris next month. The Agreement has received cautious welcome from important world capitals including Moscow. After the release of so much pent up hatred, will the three principal ethnic and religious communities learn to live together? It is doubtful if anybody will hazard a bet. Old Yugoslavia already stands irrevocably splintered with the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians having their own states. Bosnia-Herzegovina inhabited by the three ethnic groups presents the strange spectacle of retaining the fiction of a single state, but divided between the antagonists of yesterday with a very uncertain future. From this human tragedy of gigantic proportions has Kradjic learnt that by raking up the events of six centuries ago and plunging the people into murder and mayhem, he stands before humanity as a sordid criminal, who has already been judged and sentenced by the whole world?

A divided land



As appeared in April '95

Let Us Have a New Vision

by S M Ullah

BY now there will be found hardly any one who is not abreast of the latest political situation in the country. The opposition parties want a caretaker neutral government to conduct the national elections. They are adamant on this issue. The government is also equally adamant pointing out that the constitution does not provide for any caretaker government and it cannot do anything which is not in the constitution.

Both the parties made it unequivocally clear that they will not budge an inch from their stand and there will be no dialogue or discussion unless their respective positions are accepted.

So far discussion on the crisis other than the well-meaning persons who really want its resolution through dialogue and negotiations finds two groups one supporting the opposition demand for caretaker government and the other which considers acceptance of the opposition demand to be tantamount to capitulation and urges the government to use its authority to firmly handle the situation and hold the elections on schedule whether the opposition participates or not. This approach asking the government to take a rigid stand may be termed as "a prescription for paralysis and possibly disaster."

Is it as simple as that? My humble opinion is that the spirit of the issue of holding free and fair elections runs deeper than it might seem. Election is not an end in itself. It is a mechanism of choosing leaders. It means that the people without any interference from any quarter are free to exercise their franchise to elect the persons they think competent to take care of their needs and problems. To interfere in the exercise of this fundamental right is not only violation of the constitution but it also

reveals lack of respect for individual's right to enjoy his freedom. To do so also means as citizens of an independent country we lack respectability and prove ourselves unworthy of freedom.

By rigging elections or interfering in the right of voting freely, no legitimate government can be created. Only free and fair polls can create a legitimate government. Now how to hold free and fair polls?

Unfortunately the Election Commission, a statutory body created by the constitution entrusted with the duty of holding national and local elections, could not maintain its neutrality in the performance of its functions. The people of this country witnessed the result of a referendum in which the incumbent

self-proclaimed president got more than 90 per cent of the votes cast. The story of the performance of the Election Commission in conducting elections is pathetic, to say the least.

Democracy in its essence and spirit is an expression of the supremacy of the will of the people reflected in the exercise of voting right without interference from any quarter. The autocratic and authoritarian regimes were never able to act with authority, even though they were armed with stringent laws, for lack of legitimacy.

The dictators saw with dismay the majesty of the will of the people when they were overthrown by popular movements. This is a pity that negative aspect of the majesty of the people was demonstrated in the overthrow of autocratic regimes. But the spirit of this basic element of democracy is that

it will be expressed in the action of the government to follow policies which will address the problems the people face in their day-to-day life. Democracy creates an environment providing opportunities for overall development of individuals, bring out the best in them, enable them to make full use of their potentialities dormant in each individual. If election in the form democracy takes, legitimacy is its substance.

Only credible and impeccable elections reflecting the will of the people can provide substance to democracy. This will enable the government thus elected to provide basic services to the people as a whole and to stand up to special interests, such as big labour, the military establishment, the monied elite

To address the problems faced by the nation and to solve them require an effective government manned by persons who can deliver. A government can acquire effectiveness only if it is legitimately elected. In our own times we have witnessed the majesty of the will of the people. On March 1, 1971, the people were busy in their normal daily pursuits, each one in his occupation. At 11 pm the Radio Pakistan broadcast news that President Yahya Khan had postponed the summoning of the constituent Assembly of Pakistan scheduled to meet on 03.03.71 to frame a constitution for Pakistan, in which the members elected by the Bengalees formed absolute majority. The people from one end of the country

to the other, particularly in major cities and towns simultaneously and spontaneously took to the streets condemning the action of the military government of Yahya Khan. After the midnight of March 25, 1971 when Pakistani military junta cracked down on the unarmed sleeping Bengalee people and the leader of the Bengalee members of the constituent Assembly was not allowed to form government in Pakistan, they framed the constitution, formed a government though temporarily in exile, waged a war and won it and Bangladesh, an independent country took its place in the comity of nations. An unbelievable and unimaginable feat of a people considered as nonmartial race, timid and coward.

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a credible election, there is a sort of spiritual unanimity of thought and action in both the electors and the elected. An environment is created where the electors and the elected through co-operation try to achieve the goals set before them.

To us, the people of Bangladesh, democracy is not merely a form of government we view it as a system which focuses on freedom, sacredness of the individual and the power to be found in the individual. We just want to be able to go about our business freely and peacefully without anxiety and fear. We want basic human rights the exercise of which would guarantee a tranquil dignified existence free from want and fear. Bangladesh is the embodiment of the democratic aspiration.

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The differences in the stand of both the government and opposition parties on the issue of holding free and fair elections are not really that insurmountable as certain circles are trying to have us believe. They are making much of the legality of the stand taken by the government though "not everything that is legal is right" as a famous judge of USA commented. Such attempt reveals the "sick ambitions of the failed politicians" to fish in troubled waters. In this case it seems as motivated actions aimed at widening the gap between the government and the opposition parties so that the crisis is not resolved.

It is very unfortunate that the Prime Minister who may go down in history as the only head of government to complete her term during the last 48 years of both the Pakistan and Bangladesh periods taken together to succumb to the distorted and ill-motivated propaganda of those who put all the blame on the opposition for the present crisis. It is very sad that the Prime Minister accuses the opposition in the same language. "To blame the opposition is the oldest and the cheapest politician's trick" so goes the saying. Such attitude leaves no scope for negotiated settlement of the crisis.

Some thinkers who sincerely want a resolution of the crisis have opined that ego is one of the factors that is complicating the situation. But I think it is time for all of us to "worry about saving people rather than saving face."

In democracy there is no scope for taking rigid attitude towards any issue. To quote J S Mill, "Visions of freedom and happiness must be constantly discussed, altered and changed as societies change lest nations fall into 'deep slumber of a decided opinion'."

Both the government and the opposition parties are confidently proclaiming that their stand is right. As Amos Oz (Israeli novelist) has said, "Wherever there is a clash between right and right, a value higher than right ought to prevail, and this value is life itself." To allow life to prevail, there must be dialogue and negotiations if there are differences of opinions as to the approach or procedure to resolve the crisis. "You cannot establish a relationship with someone when you do not know how to listen or talk with the other party." We truly hope that we can pull together and overcome this crisis so that we can say Bangladesh is a small country, but our hearts are not. I like to conclude with some comments of L B Johnson (President of USA), having bearing on our present crisis. Lyndon Johnson was once asked in his most successful months how come he had lost a couple of minor skirmishes with Congress. "You don't want to win them all," he said. "Give the other side something, or there may come a day when you won't win anything."

Photographs of Language Movement

Sir, I took some photographs of the processions of the Language Movement, of 1952 when I was a student of the Dhaka University. I still have in my possession six negatives of the photographs. These have been published in different books, magazines and newspapers. In my view, these are the only photographs of the processions of the Language Movement from 1948-1952. I deem it essential to preserve these photographs with the negatives in the National Archives, as a document of our national movement. I wrote to the authorities concerned but till now no action has been taken in this regard. Daily Ittefaq published my article titled "Photographs of the Language Movement with Some Comments", in their Shaheed Day issue of 21st February, 1992. I wonder why the authorities concerned are reluctant to take necessary action in preserv-

Whither Muslim brotherhood?

Sir, Our Pakistani brethren are having some internal problems with the

ing these historical documents. The Bangla Academy spend a large sum for publication of books on 'EKUSHEY' but I became astonished to know that they did never undertake any move to publish album of the photographs of the Language Movement!

It is no longer possible on my part to preserve these photographs and the negatives. I, therefore, intend to dispose of the same to the interested persons. In this respect I draw the attention of the authorities concerned, UNESCO, and the intelligentsia through your newspaper.

Muhammad Taqiyullah GPO Box No: 3134 Dhaka-1000

Urdu speaking so-called Mohajirs in Karachi

Suddenly they seem to be having (or creating?) problem with 'Bangla speaking Muslims'. The hot-headedness of the Pakistani brethren in so many years have only helped to increase their internal problems one after the other. And now they are against the so-called Bangla speaking populace who have been living in Pakistan for more than four decades, most of them probably knowing nothing but Urdu, the national language of Pakistan.

It is about time that the leaders of Pakistan came to their senses and once and for all accepted reality and recognised their weaknesses so as to put their internal turmoil to a peaceful settlement.

Nahtasha Kamal Warl, Dhaka

BTV film shows

Sir, The people at BTV seems to have the audacity to dub two popular English se-

rials, Time Trax and Dark Justice, into Bangla. BTV must be thinking that the level (not to mention standard) of English in our country is very poor; but this is partly wrong. However, there are many among us who don't know (or don't care) about the correct pronunciations of English words, just because we are for Bangla (what an excuse?!). These English movies help this large section of the younger generation in our country.

Moreover, the shows have been dubbed, seemingly, in an outrageous form of Bangla, which makes it very difficult to understand the mood and sense of the scene. If BTV wants to be 'patriotic', it should take effort to produce some quality Bangla programmes or put Bangla subtitles in the English movies.

Obsession never helps. BTV should immediately reconsider its decision.

Iftikhar Rashid South Breeze School, Dhaka