# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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### President should Take an Initiative

Just when we were beginning to feel that some sort of understanding may finally come about with the President being the centrepiece, came the announcement of the election schedule. It is good nine days after the dissolution of the parliament that the EC made the announcement. The question is why now? On the other hand it can be said in the EC's favour that it announced the election schedule as soon as it could, and the nine days delay was the minimum it needed for working out the details. However, we are of the opinion that the EC's action was unwise. It should have gauged the overall political situation and acted accordingly. Holding a proper election does not mean keeping to the timetable only. It also entails creating a proper environment for holding a peaceful and free elections. If there is reasons sufficient to expect that a significant portion of the voters may not participate in the polls. and there is reasonable chance for violence and conflict, the EC should not force an election on the nation.

We are aware that the EC is bound by the Constitution to hold a free and fair election. But if the political situation is such that the possibility of a peaceful election is jeopardised, then obviously the EC must act accordingly. Imagine that our EC took the position of refusing to announce the election schedule unless the two sides agreed to an election plan. Such a position would have created the requisite pressure on both sides to come to some sort of understanding. This would have greatly enhanced EC's credibility in the public eye.

Now that the election schedule is upon us. an agreement must be worked out between the ruling party and the opposition which will ensure a peaceful environment to make a meaningful election possible. As there is no parliament, the only office that is left which can possibly play a mediating role is that of the President. Therefore, we suggest that the President should immediately invite the Prime Minister and opposition leaders and encourage them to start a dialogue. Given the President's prestige, and the need of the hour, we expect that the opposition will respond to such an invitation.

This, we see as the only possible way to bring the opposing parties to the dialogue table. Without an understanding between the two sides, we cannot have a peaceful, free and fair election. We have missed a lot of opportunities. Let us not miss this one, as this may be the only one we have left.

#### **BB's Testing-time**

The Bangladesh Bank must be worried that the rate of inflation is currently hovering at 8.7 per cent. However, the measures taken by it to contain inflation have been wide off-themark. Given the BB's diagnostic and prognostic capabilities in the field, this is regrettable though not inexplicable in terms of making its points heard by the higher authorities.

In a copy-book style, the BB is trying to fight inflation through a contractionary monetary policy featured by an increase in the bank rates geared to discourage borrowing by the scheduled banks from the central bank, other forms of inter-bank lending and, above all, to apply a credit squeeze in the public as well as the private sector. In such a scheme of things, one is at a loss to understand how the engine of real economic growth can be moved any further without the fuels of investments and productivity. We are thus led to government borrowings from the banking system which have been on the rise. It is of utmost importance that vigil be constantly kept on the public expenditure pattern in an election year when the campaign expenses of the political parties themselves are likely to exert an inflationary pressure on the national economy.

Substantial amounts of unearned incomes could find their way into the scene to be laundered on the sly. Hence the need to enforce limits on election-related expenses. Bangladesh Bank's worry is understandable.

However, it is the price control angle that needs to be taken to keep the inflationary pressure within a tolerable range. Erratic food prices which basically pushed up the inflation rate are apparently on the mend with the winter crops hitting gradually home. If the yields are substantially better than last year's, these will go to strengthen the BB's hands in containing inflation. But our best hope to keep the prices down remains pinned on a normal political environment.

#### Insufferable

One can almost see the impish smile flashing across the faces of the spoilers of the Ramna Batomul frontage and grit one's teeth in livid anger. The open space overlooking the banyan tree-shaded high ground of a delectable stage, a historical witness to many a soul-soothing Pahela Baishak celebration and cultural festivity, is now filled with 117 saplings planted within a few yards of each other.

The executive officer of the Deptt of Arboury Culture who owned up having ordered the plantation not only betrayed an over-indulged sense of daring he also seemed to have a mastery over the art of drawing analogies. For, here is what he said to our reporter: "Inside the mosque of the Holy Makkah there are so many pillars, do they deter people from saying their prayers ?"

However, the obvious answer to his poser is that the foliage and the girth of trees planted so close to each other are certain to rule out assemblage of people. There are plenty of spaces to plant trees in, even within the Ramna Park area. Must two good things - one an established one and the other a moveable one - be pitted against each other? We want the saplings to be immediately removed.

## Bangladesh Politics: Needed a Qualitative Change

IKE the bright sunny spells in a rainy day. democracy in Bangladesh has been short lived. We fight for democracy, we make supreme sacrifices for it, but we fail to sustain it. Thus democracy in Bangladesh has always been a twilight affair.

Parliament is now dissolved. Constitutionally, we have 90 days to hold elections, but practically, because of ramadan, we have more or less 45 days. And if no settlement is reached and BNP alone goes to elections. democracy will not survive.

With the passage of time. options are getting limited. The resignation of the Opposition MPs in December last year sealed off the prospect of amending the Constitution to incorporate the provisions of caretaker government; the dissolution of Parliament has closed the chapter of a national government; and a 1988-style elections will change the entire political

landscape. Historically, Awami League's attitude towards elections has always been positive. It took part in the 1970-elections under Martial Law, and despite its six-point programme was in sharp contrast with President Yahya's 5-point LFO. Likewise it participated in 1979 and 1986 elections under two military-General-turned civilian Presidents. And this time if AL participates, the

other two parties also will. But a settlement today and an election tomorrow, past experiences say, will only bring short-term peace. Free and fair election is only a means to achieve democracy. peace and stability. By itself it cannot establish democracy and bring welfare to the people. The 1954 Provincial Assembly election was free and fair, but it did not change the fate of the people. The 1970 Parliament, the end result of another free election. could not even see the light of the day. And the freest and fairest of all, the 1991 election has created the history of en masse resignation of the Opposition MPs and created an unprecedented political crisis. Hence unless there is a change of attitude of the politicians, our problems will remain.

Our political leaders must realise that the challenge of peace is much more challenging than the challenge of war. The best example is the example of Sheikh Mujib who

by Barrister Abdur Razzaq with all honesty, and courage, and without any party affiliations exert their collective influence on politics, the present foul political weather is bound to change for better. But if we remain silent, and this kind of aimless and shameless politics continues, and one after another crisis is created either to go to power or to remain in power then slowly but surely we will perish. Because we are witnessing a reckless power game. One example: In one of her letters to Sheikh Hasina. Khaleda Zia named four martyrs. In her reply Sheikh Hasina came out with a list of 29 including Khaleda Zias

unfortunate country of 120 million people where poverty, pain and suffering are the order of the day, who really cares for the half-fed and the unfed, the unemployed and the under employed, the shameful slums where human beings literally lead the life of animals, the street urchins who are born on the street and brought up on the street, the homeless who spend their nights under the capital's open sky in sun and rain - in winter and summer, the 7-year-old who instead of watching TV is wandering in the streets and looking for food in the dust-

bin, the rickshaw-puller who

has to feed a family of five

come a land of great inequalities. The high-rise buildings with all modern amenities are a horrifying contrast to the mud-hut of the poor millions. A considerable number of the hundreds of thousands rickshaw pullers in the fastest growing and polluted capital city of Dhaka could become factory workers in environment-friendly smallscale industries in a pollution free atmosphere on the bank of the river Jamuna with a guarantee for job security and primary health care facility and their children with opportunity of attending the factory school provided we have political stability which

population, an asset all our near and distant neighbours lack. We have natural resources. We have a potential economy, which attracts foreign investments. It is quite possible to give economic might and power to our people, and grow in them the much needed confidence that they can lead a decent life. They can be given freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Our people can be organised on the basis of our own values, our own culture and commitment, and can be transformed into a respectable nation. But we lack that leadership.

Moreover, there is fear and hatred and distrust in politics. Every major party, even if it is in an alliance, fears and hates and distrusts the others. And politics based on fear and hatred will neither take us anywhere nor will do any good to the country. We have to remove this distrust that darken our political horizon. This can be done if the object of politics becomes people's welfare. and if there is a change in

the quality of politics. We have endured the exploitation of the British, and the zamindars, and the Pakistanis, and the military dietators; and we have endured it long. And now we have to carry the weight and burden of an uncaring leadership which is far more heavier to carry. We see no light at the end of the tunnel. Because we are not in the tunnel. We are in wilderness. Oh Lord! how long will this continue? Help us Lord to change ourselves. Send for us a Messiah who will save us from this ignominy and calamity.

The writer is a practising advocate of the Supreme

#### We have to remove the distrust that darkens our political horizon. This can be done if the object of politics becomes people's welfare, and if there is a change in the quality of politics.

survived the challenge of war. but succumbed to the challenge of peace. Problems of peace are far more complicated. It is a fight not for power, but to give power political and economic — to the millions. Thus Winston Churchill won the Second World War, but lost the postwar general election because. to the British people Clement Atlee was a better choice to build a war-torn Britain.

Even if in the coming elections all parties participate, it is difficult to expect that the winter of discontent and disturbance will bring in a spring of continued hope and harmony. But the 8 November silent protests have shown that this kind of decent protests work. Hence if the professional groups. the businessmen, the lawyers, the journalists, the doctors, the engineers, the teachers, and even the rickshaw pullers come forward

four. One wonders what was the need of this purposeless and pathetic exercise when. undeniably, the leaders have betrayed the blood of the martyrs who went into the street having full confidence on their leadership, on their ability to lead the nation, who have sacrificed their lives with little hope of reward. who have suffered in silence and by their blood nourished the plant of freedom so that we can prosper in freedom. Their widows, their orphans and their parents have remained ever deprived, while the leaders take pride in their martyrdom and enter into a swimming competition in the sea of their blood. This is simply inhuman, simply unacceptable.

The object of politics is people's welfare. There is a saying of our beloved Prophet (SM): People's leaders are their servants. When people cry leaders weep. But in this

and also to send money to his old mother and paralysed father living in a remote village in a thatched hut? Who really cares about the growing menace of drug addicts, the trafficking of hungry women and children, the educational institution which is closed and the campus which is violent, the desertification of once-mighty Padma and the devastation of Farakka, the plight of our people in Angorpota and Dahagram who have become foreigners in their own lands, the Hill Tracts which amidst blood and fire poses a threat to national security? If our leaders do really care about this Bangladesh, and these Bangladeshis - who they claim to lead and whose votes they seek - they would never have fought on egos, but on principles in which they have little difference.

Bangladesh has also be-

The hundreds of hours of hartals called by the Opposition in the recent past have not made them any stronger. nor the government any weaker, but it has made the country more impoverished and much weaker. Germany was much more devastated in 1945 than Bangladesh in 1971. In 20 years Germany has become a strong country both politically and economically but in the twenty plus four years of our independence we have achieved less and lost more.

simply means sensible be-

haviour by the politicians.

Therefore, the people have become extremely tired of the present politics. This was amply demonstrated by the symbolic protest of the business community. Perhaps never before in peace time. so many people have suffered so much at the hands of their own politicians.

We have a homogeneous

Court of Bangladesh.

all erstwhile politicians in-

cluding Suhrawardy under

the East Bengal Disqualifica-

tion Order (EBDO). On 30th

January 1962 he was ar-

rested on the false allegation

of anti-state activity. He was

then 70. The entire student

community of East Pakistan

protested his arrest, univer-

### Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Champion of Democracy

HE 5th of December. '95 is the 32nd death anniversary of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. He was a great statesman, an undaunted politician and a highly charismatic leader who could charm the listeners with his eloquent speech and whom the deprived Bengalees regarded as their Messiah, a political saviour. In the creation of Pakistan, he was second to Jinnah but in the creation of the democratic process in this region, he was second to Huseyn Shaheed

Suhrawardy was born on 8 September, 1892 in an illustrious Muslim family from Midnapore, West Bengal. The ancestral home of the family was Suhrawardy, a city in Iraq from which it assumed its surname — Suhrawardy. The founder of the family was Shahabuddin Suhrawardy who founded the Suhrawardia order of saints and sent out his sons and disciples to Iran, Turan, Turkey, Sind, Hindustan and Bangladesh to preach Islam. The Suhrawardia family of Midnapore pioneered the Islamic renaissance movement of Bengal. Suhrawardy's father Barrister Zahidur Rahman Zahid was a Judge of Calcutta High Court, who later resigned and became a member of Bengal Legislative Assembly. His mother Khojesta Akhter Banu was a graduate with Hons in Persian Literature and a great advocate of women's education.

Suhrawardy's married life with Naiz Fatema, daughter of Sir Abdur Rahim, lasted only three years, as she died leaving a son, Shahab Suhrawardy and a daughter Akhter Jahan Suhrawardia. Shahab died in London in 1940 while pursuing his studies at Oxford. Akhter was married to Shah Ahmed Sulaiman, who died in Karachi in 1982 and is survived by her only daughter Shahida Munni, a barrister. Again in 1940, Suhrawardy married Vera Tiscenko, a former Russian actress of the Moscow Arts Theatre, and having Rashid Suhrawardy, the only child, was separated from her in 1946. Rashid Suhrawardy was brought up and educated in London and Oxford, now pursuing a career of an actor in England with the Royal Shake-

spearean Company.

In 1920, Suhrawardy re-

Tissue culture

technique

drawn to the news item pub-

lished in your daily on

November 18, 1995 under

the heading "Call to apply tis-

sue culture technique". Prof

Ahmed Shamsul Islam of

Dhaka University mentioned

in it that Bangladesh imports

potato seeds worth Tk 300 to

400 crore every year. This

statement is far from reality.

In fact, presently Bangladesh

Sir, My attention has been

turned to Calcutta from UK and became involved in the political movement of the day with the mission to establish political rights of the Muslims of Bengal. His political mentors were Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shawkat Ali. As Secretary to the Calcutta Khilafat Committee he worked hard to organise and unify the Muslims of Bengal. He had worked as Deputy Mayor under Mayor C R Das. In 1921, Suhrawardy was elected to the Bengal Legisla-

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque Table Conference in London as representative of the Muslims. He also formed an Independent Muslim Party. At the request of Jinnah, he became the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in 1936. Suhrawardy who had already proved his mettle as an able organiser contested the election of 1936 and his untiring efforts were rewarded as his Party secured 36 out of 119 Muslim seats, he himself being elected from two

decisive and paved the way for the creation of Pakistan with two divergent units.

In the Convention of Delhi held on April 7, 1946 Suhrawardy strongly protested against Jinnah's correction of the Lahore Resolution from 'states' to 'state' on the plea of typographical error. He had also protested against the partition of Bengal. When a serious riot broke out in Noakhali, Suhrawardy as a mendicant of 'Gandhi Peace Mission' risked his life

killing Suhrawardy.

pauper when the Indian Gov-

ground of non-payment of in-

come tax. Being compelled,

Suhrawardy returned to

Karachi on March 5, 1949

and his membership to the

Legislative Assembly of Pak-

istan had been cancelled.

Against the one-party state of

Liagat Ali Khan, Suhrawardy

created an opposition party

known as Awami League, and

in 1950, he extended it as All

Pakistan Awami League. He

then toured all the nooks and

corners of East Pakistan and

made it the most popular and

powerful party in the

province. He contested the

election of 1954 as a coali-

tion party of the United Front

which won all the seats ex-

cept nine. He worked so

strenuously during the elec-

which stipulated Five State

Principle. He framed the first

Constitution of Pakistan on

the basis of Parity for East

Pakistan. This recognition of

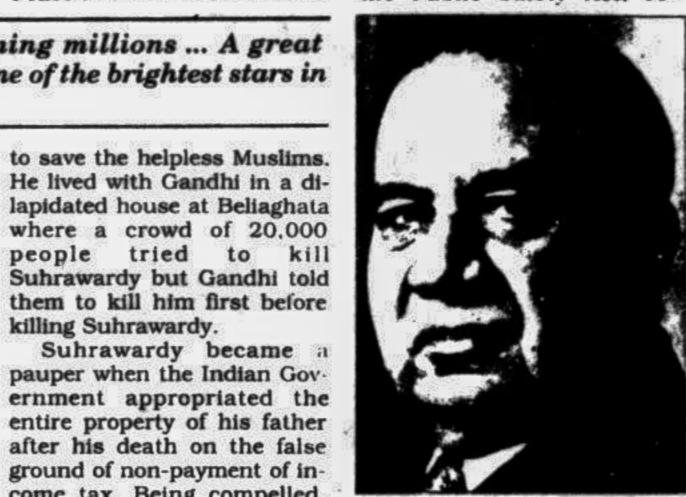
regional individuality coupled

with geographical incongruity

jectives were to hold a gen-

eral election to give democracy a fair trial, to elevate Pakistan's prestige in international arena and to ensure equal treatment to the neglected regions of Pakistan. Within one month of his assumption of power, Parliament was convened in Dhaka passed the Joint Electorate Bill was passed and equal citizenship to all guaranteed The Awami League Govern ment began to fulfil its 21point programme, abolished

sities were closed down and strikes were called throughout the country. The demand for his release gained such a momentum that Ayub Khan was compelled to release him on 19th August, 1962. His detention in jail for six the Public Safety Act, remonths and twenty days was the direct cause of his heart-After his release from jail, Suhrawardy visited Dhaka at the first opportunity on 16 September and was moved by the ovation he received at the



leased all political prisoners called regular Assembly sessions, placed and passed Bills and Budgets and held seven by-elections. He adopted more economic measures to remove disparity, maintained balance of trade, distributed foreign earnings equally between East and West Pakistan, established Film Development Corporation, the Jute Marketing Corporation, the Dhaka Improvement Trust. the Chittagong Development Authority, the Inland Water Transport Authority, and Water Development Board to

control flood. Suhrawardy was highly credited for his spirited independent foreign policy based on honesty and truth. He established friendly relations with the United States and at the same time with China, Japan and Russia, While addressing the S M Hall students of the Dhaka University, attended by me as a student, he by an equation of zeroes proved the futility of creating a Muslim bloc of all zero-powered Muslim states. This severe public assessment angered the Arab world, especially Egypt However, with the co-operation of the Western bloc he was able in passing the resolution at the Security Council calling for a plebiscite in Kashmir. This was considered a great diplomatic victory for Suhrawardy over Nehru.

As a national leader, Suhrawardy was gaining international support for his diplomatic victory and was then at the peak of his popularity. This made Iskander Mirza jealous against him. As a victim of his treachery. Suhrawardy had to resign on 11 October, 1957. When Ayub Khan assumed power on 7th October, 1958 he banished

airport, where the plane had to stop three quarter of a mile away owing to the size of the crowd. He appealed to the crowd to stand united and to assume the lead in the establishment of democracy in Pakistan. A lifelong democrat he formed a new political party known as National Democratic Front (NDF) on 5 October, 1962. His popularity reached to such a mammoth proportion that wherever he visited people in their hundreds and thousands trudged through the muddy roads of the villages to have a glimpse of their leader - a political Messiah to hear from him a new message of hope and to get a new panacea for the ills of the country. His charismatic personality and eloquent speech created a great political fervour for the return of democracy based on

> health. He suffered from two heart attacks and was admitted to a hospital in Karachi. On further deterioration of his health, Suhrawardy left for Beirut on 19 March. 1963. After some improvement he went to London to recuperate at the home of his son. Again he returned to undergo an overdue hernia operation in Zurich. He planned to return home on 3rd or 4th January, 1964. While preparation was being made to accord him a grand reception on his return from treatment abroad, the news of his sudden death in Beirut's Hotel International plunged the entire country in deep sor row. He expired in his suite in the early hours of 5th December 1963 when only an operator of the hotel was present by his side. Thus the life of the great statesman who served his country for 43 years came to a solitary and sad end. Sheikh Mujib, his political disciple brought his dead body home and his mortal remains lie buried in the old High Court compound of Dhaka alongside the graves of Sher-e-Bangla and Khawaja Nazimuddin, on all of which grand mausoleums have been built where admirers lay wreaths every day of the year

universal adult franchise.

But this continuous and

strenuous work affected his

He was a born leader destined to liberate the teeming millions ... A great champion of democracy and Hindu-Muslim unity ... One of the brightest stars in the political firmament of the subcontinent.

tive Assembly from Khidirpur industrial area. He had strongly opposed the Whipping Bill of the British Government by cautioning them that 'Indians are not animals, they are as good human beings as their white masters.' The Congress appreciated this bold stand of Suhrawardy and entered into 'Bengal Pact' in 1923 with the Muslims of Bengal under his leadership in which the Congress accepted the Muslim majority in Bengal with the principle of separate electorate and expansion of facilities for education of the Muslim students, equal Muslim representation and appointment in all elective bodies of Bengal. These were the great achievements in those days of British domination.

As a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, Suhrawardy tried at his own life's risk to bring about them when a serious riot broke out in 1926. He had organised the All India Khilafat Conference in Calcutta in 1928 and the first All Bengal Muslim Conference. He had strongly opposed the Motilal Nehru Report of 1928 which advocated joint electorate with reservation of seats for the Muslims of Bengal and Punjab which would have cut the Muslims' future. During the disastrous flood of North Bengal in 1931 Suhrawardy rendered great humanitarian service to alleviate the sufferings of the flood-stricken people. There he met the great Maulana A H Khan Bhasani whose Peasants' Conference was inaugurated by Suhrawardy. In 1932, he at-

tended the Third Round

imports potato seeds mainly

from Holland which costs

less than one crore taka. It

would be interesting and use-

ful to know about the source

of Prof Islam's such informa-

done on the use of tissue cul-

ture techniques at the Tuber

Crops Research Centre

(TCRC), Bangladesh Agricul-

tural Research Institute

(BARI), Joydebpur, Gazipur to

produce virus - free potato

seeds. The technology is now

Much works have been

constituencies of which he surrendered one to Khawaja Nazimuddin.

Suhrawardy joined the Krishak Proja League Coalition Government of A K Faziul Hug as Minister for Labour and Commerce in April 1937. Subsequently he held several other portfolios one after another including that of Finance. Under him he passed the Labour Welfare Act, the Maternity Benefit Act and the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill of 1938. Thus he became very popular with the people. He attended the Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940 and as spokesman for Bengal delegation his convincing argument helped passing the Lahore Resolution proposed by AK Fazlul Huq in 1940. In 1943 Suhrawardy joined the Khawaja Nazimuddin Ministry of Bengal as Civil Supply Minister and saved the lives of millions of famine-stricken people by opening ration shops in all cities, gruel kitchens for poor villagers

and auxiliary hospitals throughout the country. Suhrawardy, as Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and in charge of organising the election campaign toured the remotest parts of the country and became so popular that he won 114 of the 119 Muslim seats in the election of 1946. So he became the Prime Minister of Bengal on 24th April 1946 and his first act was to release all the political prisoners including the convicts of the Chittagong Armoury Raid. This earned him people's

tion that his health broke down very seriously. When Martial Law was declared in East Pakistan, he was undergoing treatment in Zurich. Golam Muhammad, the then President of Pakistan sent an emissary to Zurich requesting him to return to Pakistan to resolve all the political crises, being assured to ultimately be the Prime Minister of Pakistan although to begin with he should join as a Minister of Law being empowgratitude. Suhrawardy's vicered to 'wash the dirty linen of the regime'. To his credit tory in Bengal proved to be he resolved all constitutional crises and was able to sign the Murree Pact of 1955,

being used for "Breeders

Seed Potato Production" at production.

Director. Research Institute Gazipur, Dhaka.

made the granting of autonomy an imperative need of not mention about the contribution of TCRC in the area of virus - free seed potato Dr M S Islam

Bangladesh Agriculture

the Breeders' Seed Potato Production Centre, Debiganj of BARI. It is surprising to note that Prof Islam either ignored or deliberately did

East Pakistan, denial of which ultimately led to the independence of Bangladesh. On 12th September, 1956 Suhrawardy was sworn in as Pakistan's fifth Prime Minister. Then his three main ob-