

## What Now?

We seem to have an endless capacity to put ourselves into tight corners. Over the last two years, and especially after the resignation of the opposition MPs, just think of how many tight corners we have been in. Today we face a new, and definitely the most serious one. This deals with the forthcoming elections. Schedule has been announced, and yet there is no indication as to whether the opposition parties will participate or not. The last date for filing the nomination papers is the 17th, scrutiny by EC 18th, and the last date of withdrawal 23rd of December. This means that political parties have just 10 days within which to invite application from interested persons seeking party nomination, scrutinise them, select candidates, prepare all necessary papers, and submit to the Election Commission. It is not a realistic time frame even for the best of times. Overriding all other consideration is that of the political stalemate. How can the election take place when all opposition parties are yet to agree on an acceptable formula for holding the elections?

We think that the Chief Election Commissioner, instead of announcing the election dates, should have taken the position of refusing to do so till all parties came to an understanding. He should have even threatened to resign if both sides continued to push the country towards a chaotic situation. Such a posture would have acted as a pressure on the contending parties to reach an understanding quickly. The public image of the EC would skyrocketed, as a consequence. But, instead, we are now in another tight corner. We find it unbelievable that both sides are sitting tight as if there is no urgency to the present situation. We seem to be sitting in a bus going down hill, totally oblivious of any consequence, and hoping that something will happen at the last moment which will avert the inevitable disaster. If such a miracle occurs, then we are saved. But suppose nothing happens.

Who has given, either the government or the opposition, the right to play such a dangerous game with the future of our country?

As we had suggested earlier, the President should take an initiative and call all parties, including the Prime Minister, for a discussion. Given his nature, he is unlikely to take such a bold step. But given the time, the crisis and the national need, he should.

## Ghastly Reminder

The tragic bus fire at Jatrabari, in which nine people have been killed, has raised many a question. Most versions of the survivors and eye-witnesses indicate that the cause of fire could have been premeditated arson rather than an accident. The suspicion deepens because only hours before the incident two rival groups had clashed for gaining control over the

Syedabad bus terminal. The rivalry enjoying political backings has most of the time been confined to the members of the contending groups. But every time they fought pitched battles, they put at risk the lives of innocent passengers. And, in the past there were a few casualties among them in the crossfire. But this time the passengers have become direct victims.

Evidently, respect for the lives of passengers has gone out. They cannot be a party to the disputes whatsoever but are being sacrificed at the altar of a ruthless display of violence designed by the perpetrator to convey a message to the opponent. Now the possibilities of further attack and counter-attack cannot be ruled out. It is outrageous beyond measure that passengers were used as a pawn in the bitter rivalry of mafia-like gangs. This is a criminal act and those responsible must be meted out exemplary punishment.

The law enforcing agency cannot allow gun-fights at a terminal. But the fact is, such clashes have been taking place in their very presence. By consistently standing as silent spectators before such fights in public places the police have lost a good deal of their credibility. After what has happened at Jatrabari, it is incumbent on them to find the real cause of the bus fire and catch hold of the culprits behind it. Here indeed is a chance for them to salvage some of their lost image by a prompt and efficient discharge of their duties.

## Chittagong's Ordeal

As relatively new converts to the ways of mugging, kidnapping and 'toll' collection, the criminal elements in Chittagong must be surprising their counterparts in Dhaka a good deal by their rates of success. Chittagong being a sea-board district has had its share of smuggling activities, and to add to that notoriety comes now the news of a plethora of abduction, extortion and snatching incidents.

Where do the roots of the latest series of crimes lie? Not surely in abject poverty, something that Chittagong is largely free from: the per capita income being much higher than the national average. Our Chittagong correspondent has referred to the mayor A B M Mohiuddin as claiming that the offences are up because 'a certain political party is sheltering the criminals.' The police put this down vaguely to 'political unrest'. At any rate the police supposed to know who the offenders are or may be, so that we are relying on them to book the culprits.

Chittagong police need to be modernised having regard to such inducements to crimes there like the jingling of coins in a port city studded with retreats of the well-to-do burrowed into the hillocks and having as it does an infinite variety of exit points to the sea and the adjoining forest belts.

# One Voice for Freedom

Many journalists have spoken up in Pakistan against the chains of servitude, many have been jailed or suffered indignities in their quest to keep alive the torch of freedom

THE loosening of controls over the print media was initiated by late PM Mohd Khan Junejo during his tenure. Since Junejo's PM-ship was at the suffrance of the late dictator, Gen Ziaul Haq, the restrictions were only sparingly relaxed. Press freedom came into full bloom in Pakistan during Ms Bhutto's first stint as PM, much more than anytime in our history. On her part, as the greatest beneficiary of Press support, Ms Benazir remained benevolently tolerant of criticism. When she was downed the first time in 1990, the print media rose to her defence almost unanimously and carried on that vein through Mian Nawaz Sharif's reign till she returned to the PM House the second time around, a honeymoon of sorts lasted for some time. However, being the unofficial guardian of accountability, the print media started to focus on inefficiency, nepotism and corruption in government, move sensitive to critical review this time around Ms Benazir has started to lean more on the Establishment. The chasm between her and the Press has deepened, the Establishment and a free Press being daggers drawn as sworn enemies. Professionals like Hussain Haqqani and (now Farhat Ullah Babar) have kept the relationship between the PM and the Press going, but more times than not they have been circumscribed by the mandarins who have successfully seen through every successive government.

Sensitivity to criticism is not a phenomenon confined to Pakistan alone. Former Singapore PM (and now Senior Minister) Lee Kwan Yew, is known to react badly. A man of outstanding integrity, having performed a miracle in transforming Singapore into one of the first rate economies of the world, the senior minister may be forgiven in not taking kindly to criticism that he views as personal. Given the fact that not only his honesty but of also those whom he has chosen to succeed him is beyond question, the curtailment of Press freedom in Singapore is not viewed with much concern by the populace, content in the knowledge that it has had a good deal

from an outstanding team of leaders in achieving a spectacular enhancement of the quality of life in the Island state. Therefore contempt proceedings, particularly against the foreign print media are a common occurrence and arouses no reaction among the masses. This is notwithstanding the fact with Lee Kwan Yew's God-like status in Singapore. It is hardly likely that any Court would give a verdict against him, irrespective of the merits of his plaint. However, this has aroused world public reaction, the famous columnist William Safire even inviting Mr Lee Kwan Yew to a public debate on Press Freedom. The Singapore model is much admired in Pakistan by those who are the target of media criticism, the only option previously available to the Establishment being to use intimidation by official machinery. However, given the political inroads made into our judiciary, there is reasonable doubt whether one could get the benefit of blind justice in Pakistan.

The trial of Emile Zola in the 'Captain Dreyfus' case in France early in this century serves as a model example of how powers of the State can be used to subvert justice and cow down the Press. In the late nineteenth century France faced humiliation at the hands of Germany and had to cede the Sedan. Looking around for scapegoats, the French found a perfect fall-guy in Captain Dreyfus, a Jew who worked for the French General Staff. A note was discovered written to the German Military Attache and though the handwriting was in considerable doubt, was sourced to Dreyfus as the author. Dreyfus was arrested, tried and convicted to life imprisonment in Devil's Island. His family kept on fighting for this innocent man's release but though some of Dreyfus' superiors who were in position of influence in the Army realised that miscarriage of justice had taken place, they kept on covering up, even sending one recalcitrant officer off on a special inspection trip abroad in order to keep him from disclosing the

truth. The ironic part is that by this time they knew that by a certain Major Esterhazy was the traitor who had passed the secrets to the Germans but in their effort to cover up the wrong-doing, they started to protect this man, even forging other papers to further implicate Dreyfus.

In time, family and relatives of Dreyfus approached Emile Zola, the renowned French writer, to intervene by taking up public cudgels on the behalf of an innocent man condemned to spend the rest of his life in fetters.

Listening to the flimsy and circumstantial evidence, Zola decided that Dreyfus was innocent and needed his help as the machinery of the State was involved in fabrication and cover-up on a great scale. He then wrote the historical

astray and hide its mistakes." Emile Zola's trial lasted 16 days in which he was not given the freedom granted to murderers and thieves, they can defend themselves, they can call witnesses." The President of the Tribunal, Deiegorgue, suppressed any attempts of the defence to introduce new testimony, whenever Zola's counsel, Fernand Labori, asked an embarrassing question, he was stopped from putting that question.

The Courtroom was packed by military officers in mufti who constantly raised anti-Zola slogans, outside large crowds paid for by military intelligence also chanted anti-Zola slogans. This travesty of justice was stage-managed to stop the voice of accountability from being raised. The Jury men were

hearing of the case resulted in Dreyfus being reinstated with full military honours. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence this took some doing. Most of the concerned military officers who were involved in the false persecution, telling lies and framing false evidence, had to resign. History has not recorded how many resigned on the moral grounds that they had knowingly participated in sending an innocent man to hell on Earth. Zola's crusade for truth had not been in vain.

A free Press remains the greatest guardian of democracy as it holds individuals accountable for their actions. If a person in a responsible position in the intelligence services diverts secret funds to make a palatial house for himself, where is the check and balance in the system? While it may be true that sometimes press freedom is taken to be a licence for libel by some, for the most part self-discipline and morality governs the members of the Fourth Estate. To cater to those who resort to fabrication and falsehood, the laws of contempt hang as a Sword of Damocles. The Establishment's normal penchant is to use official machinery to subdue its opponents but since it excites adverse public reaction, to turn to courts under the contempt laws, while using that part of the media that is under their control to carry out a public trial even before the case goes to court.

The voice of freedom thus remains in thrall at the sufferance of those in power. A law meant to protect the citizens from being unduly persecuted by the media becomes a weapon to keep this freedom suppressed. Increasingly newly emerging democracies (NEDs) are looking at authoritarian role models that only allow sanitized criticism with kid gloves on to pose as democracies but get away by intimidating journalists and generally making life miserable for those who step over the fail-safe line.

Many journalists have spoken up in Pakistan against the chains of servitude, many have been jailed or suffered indignities in their quest to

keep alive the torch of freedom. Certainly over the years the situation had become better in Pakistan when Ms Bhutto opened up the doors to the print media with respect to accountability. However, as her recent outburst has shown there are signs that the advice she is getting is directed against the press freedom she was most instrumental in bringing about. This calls for caution as the forces of restraint have it in their power to manipulate the shutting down of this freedom altogether.

Among the many voices for freedom raised in Pakistan in the English Language Press, among them Altaf Gauhar, Humayun Gauhar, Kamran Khan, Najam Sethi, Shireen Mazari, Ayaz Amir, Naseem Zehra, Mushahid Hussain, M B Naqvi, Razia Bhatti, Ghazi Salahuddin, Amina Gilani, Nadira etc there is none more potent presently in its own category than Ardeshr Cowasjee. His column on Friday is read widely, photocopies are distributed. Well-researched and combining wit with scorn, his writing is taken to be reflective of the sign of the times and the general public mood.

Irreverent he may be, inaccurate he certainly is not. Successive governments, none more than Jam Sadiq Ali's, have felt his written rapier thrusts, the most tolerant by far had been the Ms Bhutto regime. No more! There is even talk of 'sedition' in the air, of incarceration without trial, files are being shuffled in the bureaucratic haunts to contrive stratagem to shut this voice raised for freedom. Someone, somewhere is sore about the fulminations of Mr Cowasjee, the minions down the line are scurrying to somehow prove they are 'more loyal than the King'.

Symbolically Ardeshr Cowasjee has become to Pakistan what Emile Zola was to France, so one must advise caution to those who want to suppress this voice. Can we smother the refrain about the public aspirations about raw accountability? What is ironic is that Ms Bhutto has been the fresh wind that ushered in press freedom, will this same wind run sour and uproot the roots of that freedom?

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

manuscript, which former French PM Clemenceau labelled as 'J'accuse...' (I accuse) and which appeared on January 13, 1898 in the Parisian newspaper 'L'Aurore'.

To quote Philip Walker in his book, 'Zola', 'It was everything that Zola had meant it to be; a pre-meditated provocation, a cry of anger, a brilliant expose of the facts of the affair, an appeal to the humanitarian idealism which for millions of Frenchmen like himself still had the face of a religion.' For the first time the word 'intellectual' was used as writers, poets, journalists, etc flocked to put their signatures in support of Zola's counter-indictment.

Zola's attack was meant to provoke those who had been involved in framing Dreyfus, among them Generals Mercier, Billot, the two war ministers involved in the case, with 'either hiding the truth, deliberately lying or yielding to others. It accused the war office of conducting a despicable newspaper campaign to lead public opinion

intimidated by their names and addresses being published in newspapers, the results were predictable.

Despite his final entreaty, 'May my works perish if Dreyfus is not innocent,' Zola was found guilty by a vote of seven to five and he went off on self-imposed exile in England rather than face incarceration. However Zola had started a chain of events that could not be stopped, in his words, 'Truth is on the march and nothing will stop it.' He said 'It was a crime to exploit patriotism in the work of hatred, a crime to make the saber a modern God when all human science was striving to construct the great future edifice of truth and justice. When you bury the truth underground, it grows there, it acquires such explosive force that the day it erupts, it blows up everything with it.'

In the end truth prevailed, Col Henry, who had masterminded the forgery committed suicide after making a full confession. Dreyfus' conviction was quashed and a re-

# Declaration of State of Emergency

Ershad's administrative edifice began to crumble as the general public became more and more militant. The death of Dr Milton gave the opposition new impetus. The promulgation of the Emergency, and the government's inability to enforce it, increased Ershad's vulnerability even further. The panicky emergency cabinet meeting revealed it all.

AFTER Tokyo, President Ershad's next visit abroad was to Male, the capital of Maldives. On 19 November '90 afternoon he reached Male with Begum Rawshan Ershad to attend the Fifth SAARC Head of States Conference. He spent three days there but remained very worried and often talked to various leaders in Dhaka on telephone. In his absence, the Combined Opposition Alliances intensified their movement. They declared one political programme after another. Last week of Nov '90 was full of political activities. A whole day hartal was called in Dhaka and other cities by the Combined Opposition Alliances on 27 Nov '90. Amid expectation of a big show of force in Dhaka, President Ershad left for Chittagong in the morning to inaugurate the main building of the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) and two Japanese factories located near Patenga. Earlier, JP leaders of Chittagong wanted to hold a public meeting in the city. I got hints that there would be violent anti-Ershad demonstrations if he went there. Commissioner, Chittagong Metropolitan Police made a request to me if the President's visit to city areas could be avoided. But some of the JP local leaders were insisting to take him to the city centre.

After inauguration of EPZ office and visit to the two factories, President Ershad became indecisive. He had gone to Chittagong to show his busy schedules in the print and electronic media. If enough activities were not shown people might think

that his strength was also waning in Chittagong. So he thought of extending his stay and some offhand schedules were planned. After EPZ, he went to Chittagong Airport to review development plans for the Airport. The Japanese Ambassador was taken with us. The President was driving a jeep which was followed by a dozen of vehicles. He stopped in the middle of the runway and conferred with the Ambassador, ministers and others accompanying him. TV cameramen took few shots. Main aim was to generate more news for the evening TV broadcast.

After the airport visit, we left for Halishahar by helicopter and then to a place named Kaiballya Dham by road. A famous Hindu temple was located there. A few days ago it was damaged by hooligans. The President went round the damaged temple and the burnt localities adjacent to it. All these activities made good news items for radio and TV.

Meanwhile, we learnt that road blocks were set up in a number of places and thousands of people gathered to demonstrate against Ershad. From Kaiballya Dham we went to Halishahar Army Officers' Mess for lunch. Here I got a call from Maj Gen Ashraf, Director General of Forces Intelligence (DGNSI). He told me that one doctor named Milton was killed in a cross firing near Dhaka Medical College. Ashraf talked to

the President for some time. We left for Dhaka hurriedly without taking lunch. Ashraf received the President at the heliport and accompanied him to his residence. I left for Bangabhaban from the heliport and en route saw burnt vehicles and other signs of disturbances in some places.

As soon as I reached my residence in Bangabhaban I received a telephone call from the President. He in-

formed me that Emergency would be declared and curfew would be imposed from 6 pm. He would also address the nation on TV and radio at 9 pm that night and I should arrange recording of address in his office at 6:30 pm. He called few ministers and two DGs of the intelligence agencies in his residence for discussion. I went to the President's Office at 6 pm. The president was yet to arrive but Radio and TV men were ready with their equipment. He arrived at 6:30, rehearsed the written address a few times and finally completed the recording. It took about 25 minutes. After recording of the address, the President wanted to talk to the ministers and JP leaders about the imposition of Emergency

Rule. Ministers were told on telephone to reach the President's office immediately. So long only Vice President Moudud Alamed and Home Minister Mahmudul Hasan were with him. By 8 pm all the ministers present in Dhaka assembled at the drafting room of International Conference Centre (ICC) next to the President's Office. President Ershad addressed for about thirty minutes

courage and voiced his dis-sension. In an offending tone he charged as to why the Cabinet was not consulted before deciding such an important issue. Most of the ministers were looking terrified and remained speechless. Shah Moazzem Hossain, the Deputy Prime Minister and General Secretary of the party was hiding his face; I expected that he would also voice his resentment but he preferred to remain silent. Distinctively, others avoided the risk of earning presidential dis-favour by raising points not liked by him. President Ershad himself was also looking upset and embarrassed and wanted to leave quickly. He terminated the meeting abruptly giving no further chance of airing resentments or dissents by anyone. He knew well when and how to blame others, show anger and make someone a scapegoat for his own mistakes. These are some of the tricks used by men in power when in crisis and President Ershad was proficient in this respect.

Declaration of State of Emergency had only aggravated the whole situation. Instead of making the things favourable for Ershad it went further against him. Combined Opposition parties could attract more people in favour of the movement. It was fast drifting towards disorder. The President thought that declaration of Emer-

gency and some tough measures would help him. At the beginning he was not in favour of declaring Emergency. I heard him questioning what options he would be left with to adopt if Emergency Rules were violated. As the situation was developing he had no option but to impose Emergency Rule.

From 27 Nov '90 evening the Opposition Alliances further intensified their movements violating the Emergency regulations. Hartals, meetings followed by processions and demonstrations were parts of daily routine. Many untoward incidents started occurring causing deaths, damages to vehicles and property. Though curfew was imposed from 27 November night but people started disregarding curfew restrictions immediately. Government lost its ability to enforce Emergency Rule. Army troops were deployed in Dhaka but they had instructions to avoid clashes with demonstrators. Journalists' and newspaper owners' associations decided not to publish newspapers in protest against Emergency Rule. It was more damaging to Ershad and his party than the opposition Alliance's actions. Radio and TV started broadcasting only government versions of the political movements with no coverage of important incidents. Common people, including responsible government officers, depended mostly on foreign radio broadcasts.

Tomorrow: Helicopter Trip of Dec '90

The writer is former Military Secretary to the President of Bangladesh.



## FALL OF GENERAL ERSHAD

by Maj Gen Manzur Rashid Khan (Retd)

showing his annoyance and bitterness regarding the Opposition activities. Ershad blamed JP leaders for failing to counter the opposition parties. He said that their inefficiency, inactivity and infighting had made the party weak. They were busy to look after their own interest and did not work for the party. His one comment was worth quoting here. He said, 'You made tons of money but never bothered to work for the party.' Never before I saw him give such a tongue-lashing to his party leaders and ministers so openly. There was pin drop silence. All were in a state of shock giving out a look of helplessness and discomfort. After some time, Kazi Zafar, the Prime Minister, gathered some

another much more than they realise, and willing to admit. And we need them both for democracy in our country. Lets go back and think for a moment. Jamaat does not believe in the type of democracy that we want. It is not in its party philosophy. JP's brand of democracy we have already rejected. In fact yesterday's celebration is a testimony to that. That leaves for us with only BNP and AL. And leaves Khaleda and Hasina only with each other, and no one else. These are our two main stream democratic parties.

Our series on the Fall of

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leaders with the highest prestige and power in the country. To one of you, our people gave the right to govern for a fixed period, within the purview of the parliament as the supreme legislative and watchdog body. To the other, the nation gave the right to be the 'Shadow Prime Minister' and the Leadership of the Opposition. In this role people expected to watch you, and may be give you the task of governing the next time around.

For all that our poor, half starved, hardworking, miserable but generous people so lovingly and expectantly gave you both, the question we

want ask is WHAT HAVE YOU GIVEN THEM IN RETURN?

We do not know the feedback mechanism available to Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina to gauge what people are thinking. Permit us to share with you both what people tell us. Firstly they fed up with your intransigence. They say that Begum Zia is within her legal rights when she does not want to compromise, and Hasina is using her democratic rights to protest when she calls for hartals. But who will defend, ensure or promote our rights to two square meals a day and our right to work for our living? Second, people say that one leader is too eager to cling to power, and the other

## Democracy Day Thoughts

too impatient to wait for her chance to come. Both use rhetoric of democracy as long it suit their personal needs, but do not believe in it. It is matter of convenience for them. Third, people say that both have long ago lost sight of the country and the people who have given the two leaders their greatest glory. Fourth, that both leaders have become totally consumed by personal hatred, which is completely distorting their view of things, and of which interested people are taking full advantage.

Khaleda and Hasina need

Ershad (page 4) clearly shows that the military dictator was invincible till AL and BNP joined forces. Until then autocracy reigned. Today also as AL and BNP fights fundamentalism and the people rejected on 6th December '90 gain ground.

These are some of the thoughts we would like to leave with Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina. What hope are you giving the nation? Please know for certain that nobody believes about the 'development wave that is sweeping the country' brought about by vote and 'bhat (food)' that the other profess to be waging. Both leaders are suf-

fering from what I call the 'Walkman syndrome'. Walkman (a Sony brand name) is a small audio cassette player that permits one to carry his or her own music or whatever is in the tape) wherever one goes. This means regardless of where one is, one can listen to the same music. Walkman permits one to be totally oblivious of his or her surroundings, and listen to only what is desired. Our leaders, wherever they go, hear only their supporters and sycophants. Like the tape in the walkman the same music is played all the time, making them oblivious to what the rest of the people are thinking and saying.