

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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### Dialogue under President

As things stand today, the opposition and the ruling party are agreed on two fundamental points. One, a dialogue must be held to resolve the crisis; and secondly, a neutral government will supervise future elections. The dialogue option has acquired a new meaning for the opposition political parties owing to the fact that the demand they had fought for so long has been categorically accepted by the ruling party. Both sides are equally seized also with the need for the general election to be held at the quickest.

What apparently upsets the apple cart for the BNP is the opposition's insistence that unless the talks are initiated by the President of the Republic they shall not sit for these. Notably, the Prime Minister in her Sunday night speech attempted to draw the opposition to talks by accepting their fundamental demand and did not mention anywhere that the dialogue could not be initiated by the President.

The President of the Republic has a given status of primacy in the Constitution under circumstances such as are prevailing in the country by virtue of his residual powers. So, he can rise to the occasion. Far from assuming the role of the government of the day, the President can surely exercise his moral influence which seems acceptable to the opposition and should be so to the BNP, to bring the parties together for the talks. If that happens, the BNP, for all practical purposes, will be appearing as a political party which has really gone out of the way to hold a dialogue. Besides, the opposition needs not be touchy on the so-called 'governmental look' of the BNP simply because the talks will be held within the purview of the agreed agenda and the outcome, too, will be implemented through a machinery established by mutual consent.

To start the process we suggest that President may send out separate letters of invitation to all concerned to attend a dialogue at his initiative. This the President can do within his present constitutional position. If the letters go out immediately then the opposition can, and should, withdraw — or at least postpone — its non-cooperation programme due to start from the 9th. Once the dialogue starts then all issues as to how quickly a neutral government can be put into place, and how quickly the present government can resign and hand over power to such a government can all be settled through discussion. By agreeing to the process through the President, BNP will have conceded to a major demand of the opposition. As a reciprocal gesture, opposition should drop all other preconditions. We must remind the opposition that conciliatory gestures by BNP should not be seen as its weakness. The nation needs, and demands, an understanding. Please remember "compromise" is not defeat. And when "compromise" comes because of the greater national interest, then it is "highly honourable and extremely glorious."

### Worth Reciprocating

The ruling BNP took a wise decision by deferring its public rally from today to tomorrow, and then bringing it back to today, in order to avert a confrontation with the opposition. The latter's hartal programme came to militate against the ruling party's rally programme on March 6. This move went well with the people who want show of force to be replaced by restraint exercised from a high moral ground.

The opposition parties have in the meantime shifted their programme to March 7, as they claim, to facilitate the return of the devotees from Ijtema to their homes. But such an excuse will fool nobody. The hartal has been shifted unwisely and will appear as a deliberate attempt to seek violent confrontation with the ruling party. The BNP has now very wisely and cleverly, brought the rally back to today. We think the opposition, as a gesture to create a conducive climate for dialogue, should call off the hartal.

The day should also be spared of hartal because of its historic importance. The March 7 speech of Bangabandhu provides for us an occasion of celebration and proud remembrance.

Now that the BNP has made a positive gesture, let it be reciprocated. Much of the confusion will be removed through similar moves. If the parties can understand each other better, it will be easier to scale down the confrontational position of all parties for a broader understanding encompassing all areas of contentious issues.

We have all through been pleading for a few such concessions and conciliatory moves for bridging political differences between the party in power and the combined opposition. If the government is to blame for the recent excesses committed against the opposition party leaders and workers, the opposition parties have also to take the blame for having at times crossed the limits.

### **Hamas Strikes**

The Hamas militants' latest wave of terrorist strikes in Israel cannot but bring some ignominy on the glorious Palestinian Revolution.

Why is Hamas acting in such a fashion? Plainly to undermine and eventually to scuttle the peace process. And the timing of the massacre couldn't have been more adverse for Shimon Peres in view of the ensuing polls.

Destabilisation would not be allowed to infect states, for one thing by the world powers, and by the states in the region, for another. The peace process, although starting with Israel-Palestine strife at the centrepoint; has now become a Mid-East peace process with all of the Arabic-speaking world having very real stakes in it.

Islamic fundamentalism is fast becoming a synonym for cowardly terrorism — anti-human and militating against all positive values of all religions particularly Islam. The murderers are equating jihad with terrorism in all of maghreb and mashriq and beyond.

Israel is preparing for a terrible retribution for the Hamas murderers. While they must be made to pay for their crimes, the peace process must be protected from any untoward scratches.

## Crisis to Conflict?

by Manzoor Hasan

Whether a crisis can be resolved depends on a collection of techniques ranging from the reduction of psychological abnormalities among the political leaders to forceful means. In between the two extremes, there are other options.

seems to be taking a turn for the worse. The question which is being asked is whether the crisis could have been managed and whether it is inevitable that the crisis be symbolic importance and compromise may become quite transformed into a state of difficult as such a move will be conflict. There is no doubt. and a contention which could seen as a sacrifice of some be backed up by enough great principle. Finally, in such evidence in academic psycholan environment there is a ogy, that human race is so congreater propensity to overreact stituted that acts of violence to perceived provocations. In may have a positive appeal and such a context cliches such as that conflict is built into the "catch-22 situation", "vicious system of human relations. cycle', "too late, too little" Notwithstanding this general would be branded rhetorically. Whether a crisis can be repremise it is also well-known solved depends on a collection that mankind has also learn to control its violent nature

ANGLADESH has gone

through a prolonged

period of crisis and it

S Congressman widely

known as a trouble-

shooter for his' out-

standing contribution and

excellence in resolving

disputes and crises wherein

US interests and concerns

were serious, could also have

played a kind of shuttle diplo-

macy to bring the two topmost

leaders - BNP chairperson

and Prime Minister Khaleda

Zia and AL president and erst-

while leader of the opposition

Sheikh Hasina — to a

"Negotiating Table" at least

during his recent presence at

Dhaka. But, instead of doing so,

he took resort to quiet diplo-

macy and left Bangladesh with

a seemingly impression that

BNP's stand and post-election

approach were logical, prag-

matic and time-oriented to

come out of the long-standing

and staggering stalemate that

has brought this country virtu-

unofficial visit to Bangladesh

the trouble-shooter law-maker

while talking to the waiting

press at the Zia International

Airport, just prior to his de-

parture for Washington, ap-

prised the nation of his detec-

tion of a few shots (may be

termed as trouble shooter's

shots or Richardson's formula)

which he believed could be ef-

fective to put an end to the

present impasse in

tion between the leaders: Be-

cause he felt "since there was

no dialogue between the two

leaders for a long time, crisis

have a realization out of his

talks with Khaleda Zia and

Sheikh Hasina that pre-condi-

tion worked as an obstacle for

opening any dialogue between

them in particular and leaders

from where it stopped in Jan-

uary: Because if a dialogue is to

c) Dialogue can be started

b) Dialogue without any pre-

aggravated'

in general

a) Dialogue, not confronta-

Bangladesh. The shots are:

At the end of his two-day

ally to a total standstill.

of techniques ranging from the reduction of psychological abthrough various mechanism normalities among the political since time immemorial. leaders to forceful means. In A crisis is just one stage of conflict. In order to appreciate between the two extremes. there are other options. But the present crisis of Bangladesh one has to take before the appropriate remedy could be applied it is necessary into account, among other things, the mental factors as to carry out a proper analysis of the crisis, for example, is it irrationality, prejudice, stereotyping and other forms of misa legal or political crisis or a conception. In other words, combination of both. Then it antagonism, distrust, suspicion has to be determined whether and the like can be the basis of there exists the willingness to a crisis. In such an environresolve the crisis. In other words, the identification of the ment even a genuine peace gesture will probably be redominant groups within the political parties should give jected as trick, minor issues will take on an ideological or the general public a clear indi- beings categories events for

cation as to whether it is the "doves" or the "hawks" who are in control of the decision-making process.

The other important factor to be taken into account in analysising the process of crisis management is the quality of information channeled to those who are taking the final decisions. Studies in crisis management would show that most toppled politicians in Third World countries had a strong belief that they would survive the storm, for example. Ayub Khan in Pakistan, the Shah of Iran, Marcos in the Philippines just to name a few.

A common mistake on the part of the politicians when confronted with a crisis is to compare it with a previous one. Every situation is novel when all its properties are considered. The Liberation War of 1971 is not comparable to 1996 and neither is the topple of Ershad in 1990 comparable to the present crisis. But nevertheless human

the purpose of evaluation and action. It is the quality of this categorisation that could make a real difference between survival and downfall of any government Bangladesh has developed into a form of art the management of natural disasters. There now exist sophisticated infrastructure at different levels of decision-making process which can be activated at a very short notice on the receipt of very accurate information from various sources. Furthermore, the political will is also normally evident in

The paramount objective of the politicians should be to deescalate the crisis by arriving at an arrangement which will provide a "cooling-off" period; if necessary, the present personalities should step aside and bring in some new faces in order to remove the present incompatibility; as we have seen over the last couple of years a number of "good offices" are prepared to step in and mediate; with clear thinking and correct signalling

tackling such natural disasters.

the politicians and other leading citizens of the country can still resolve the orisis.

Henry Kissinger wrote in

his The White House Years: Some may visualize crisis management as a frenzied affair 'in which key policymakers converge on the White House in their limousines, when harassed officials are bombarded by nervous aides rushing in and out with the latest flash cable; Oddly enough. I have found this not to be accurate; periods of crisis, to be sure, involve great tension but they are also characterised by a strange tranquility. All the petty day to day details are stripped away: they are either ignored. postponed, or handled by subordinates. Personality clashes are reduced; too much is usually at stake for normal jealousies to operate. In a crisis only the strongest strive for responsibility; the rest are intimidated by the knowledge that failure will demand a scapegoat. Many hide behind a consensus that they will be

reluctant to shape: others concentrate on registering objections that will provide alibis after the event. The few prepared to grapple with circumstances are usually undisturbed in the eye of a hurricane. All around the there is commotion; they themselves operate in solitude and a great stillness that yields, as the resolution nears to exhaus-

tion, exhilaration, or despair. . In this hour of great need when the country is faced with a terrible internecine conflict where are those few who would grapple and be counted. This is the time when one has to be imaginative in approach rather than being predictable and phoney. This is the time for real leadership taking into account the people's aspirations and fears. This is the time to forget personal ego and bring into focus the national interests. Without the magnanimity and foresight the consequences could be dire and like the lemmings we will be heading towards the sea and in mass hysteria throw ourselves off the cliff and commit a collective suicide. Time will tell whether the nation will be spared that suici-

The writer is a Barrister-at-

# Richardson's Visit to Bangladesh: Some Speculation

by Sinha M.A. Sayeed

Richardson said that he would report back to the Administration and the Congress in Washington. In the wake of the highly-talked about "Congressional Hearing on Bangladesh" scheduled to be held some time in the last week of March, this very Congressional contact, first of its kind, under the existing circumstances shall have its own weight, value and significance.

be resumed, it needs a start or point and it is better to start

from the where it stopped. d) It is up to the leaders to solve their problem: Because he understands "US cannot substitute for Bangladeshis own initiative and ingenuity to solve the problem" and hence. it is up to the parties concerned to come out with a so-

There is no denying the fact that before going for a thorough anatomy... analysis and consequently testing the applicability of the shots of the trouble-shooter, a careful enquiry into the stands and formulas of BNP and AL backed by the opposition is an unavoidable pre-condition.

BNP's post-election stand goes as under: al BNP being the party in power had to go for elections to the Sixth Sangsad out of its constitutional obligation under the circumstances, favourable or not. With the elections over. constitution has duly been

saved, preserved, and fortified. b) As the very elections were not for staying in power for the constitutionally stipulated 5-year term, dialogue should be started with opposition to reach at a formula or consensus for a free, fair and

fully participated election. c) Putting the consensus condition: Because he might . formula into a bill and getting passed accordingly by the Sixth Sangsad before moving for a free, fair and fully participated election under the new arrangement - caretaker or interim caretaker government whatever the name may be.

Opposition-backed AL's post-election formula stands.

a) Immediate cancellation of the elections of February 15.

b) Resignation of BNP cabinet or dismissal of BNP cabinet by the President, if required with a reference from Supreme Court. c) Finally, a call by the President to the political par-

ties including BNP to sit with him to devise the details to form a neutral caretaker government to conduct the next fair. free and fully participated In reality, the stands and

formulas of BNP and AL backed by the opposition are diametrically opposed to each other. Both are overwhelmed with their own interpretations, logic, analysis and approaches to a possible solution of the problem.

With this broad-based perspective in mind, if we proceed to apply the shots of the trouble-shooter Congressman to put an end to the crisis, we

His first shot calling for a dialogue between the two leaders and fourth shot asking our leaders to solve our own problem by ourselves without looking for any outside solution, tantamount to a generalised reality and necessity about which nobody objects.

His second shot insisting on dialogue without any pre-condition itself appears to be a pre-condition for AL and the opposition as it contains the very basis for immediate prerecognition, or, to say more appropriately, auto-recognition to the legitimacy of BNP Government that came out through the elections of Febru-

ary 15. It's a negation to his own reassertion to the stand of US State Department that stated rather unequivocally that the election was flawed and heavily rigged.

His third shot — start from where it stopped in January is, in fact his second request to AL and the opposition to extend support to the legitimacy of BNP Government. Dialogue was stopped in January also because of detection of ambaguities and differences of opinions among BNP negotiators. Besides, starting from the last stoppage means to forget what happened during the intermediary

period. Richardson's formula, in fact. willingly or unwillingly. reflects the stand of BNP. If he thought that ends might not be allowed to be jeopardised by the means, in that case BNP government may have a sigh of. relief of being in place.

It may be viewed also this way: Once BNP denied both the ends and the means, now it embraces both; the difference is, by conceding both, it wants to get legitimacy of the elections to the sixth Sangsad. Interestingly enough,

Richardson has, until recently,

not budged a single inch from

the stand and policy of Clinton Administration being manifested by the statements and briefings of the State Department, before and after the elections. After going back to Washington he had talks with fellow Congressmen and the Administration and further reiterated his stand on Bangladesh stating, "By all counts, the election left a lot to be desired," and pointed out. "It asked by all parties, we will be glad, of course, to give advice. We do that privately. He categorically emphasised

on dialogue between the parties concerned.

BNP joint secretary general and agriculture minister Mannan Bhuiyan who has recently been assigned by the PM and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia to start contacts with the opposition said to the press: "We think the atmosphere to sit in a dialogue still exists and the possibility of an acceptable solution is bright as both the sides have an obligation to the nation." Commenting on the government's move to arrest the opposition leaders and activists he pointed out that thing would be OK. in course of time. Meanwhile in her address over Radio and Television on March 3. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia echoed the same in her 3-point formula -1). Constitution bill to be amended the 1st session of 6th Sangsad; 2) Election to the 7th Sangsad within shortest possible time; 3) EC to have full power to conduct the polls urging all political parties. groups and professional organisations and the people to extend cooperation to resolve

blackhole. Requests, appeals, attempts and advices, national and international, are being constantly made to both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina to save the nation without any further delay. In an open letter to them President of DCCI requested for Khaleda's "magnanimity" and Hasina's "flexibility and welfare-oriented steps." FBCCI president categorically made fervent calls for immediate consensus between the two leaders.

the political crisis. But

outright and instant rejection

of her call by the opposition

perhaps accelerated the speed

of the 23-month-long stand-off

moving towards and unknown

Now, should we treat AL and the opposition's 6-point programme of non-cooperation movement from March 9 till the fall of BNP government as also a direct rejection to the trouble-shooter's shots?

Both AL and BNP still remain tight-lipped about the outcome of their talks with Richardson and about his shots, no formal reaction has yet been made available. Have the talks and meetings conceived anything positive at all that may be workable very soon

otherwise? Richardson said that he would report back to the Administration and the Congress in Washington. In the wake of the highly-talked about "Congressional Hearing on Bangladesh" scheduled to be held some time in the last week of March, this very Congressional contact, first of its kind, under the existing circumstances shall have its own weight, value and significance as Richardson, a Democrat himself disclosed that the visit was made at the request of President Clinton to have an

understanding of the problem Republicans are now dominating both Houses of Congress, Senate and House of Representatives. Sheikh Hasina is said to have established links with the Republicans in particular and Democrats in general, including Bob Dole, leader of the majority in the Senate and Benamin Gilman, chairman of the

international committee of the

House of Representatives. Muntasir Mamun, a noted historian and professor of history. University of Dhaka observed with a very careful bent of mind: "Bangladesh is a land where everything is possible." So, who knows that the very Congressional hearing on Bangladesh shall not be faced with an unexpected political scenario (favourable and congenial for the people at large)

The writer is joint secretary for international affairs of Jatiya Party

in Bangladesh?

### Universities for

northern Bangladesh

Sir, Education is one of the basic fundamental rights of the citizen's of any country. It is the duty of the government to provide educational facilities for all, irrespective of any area. But, in fact, the people of northern Bangladesh are not getting enough facilities for higher education. Excepting one general university in Raishahi, there is no other university in whole of northern Bangladesh. By now, only some of the colleges with present teaching staff, library and laboratory facilities have been allowed to teach some selected subjects in Honours and Masters courses.

But the students who are taking Honours, Masters degree from these college-universities are generally not doing well in the competitive examination in comparison with the students coming out from other full-fledged universities. True how the students will acquire knowledge if there is no experienced teachers and well-equipped library and research facilities?

In mufassil districts, government degree colleges are suffering for the want of teachers. The Public Service Commission conducted a special examination (namely 16th BCS) to recruit teachers on emergency basis to equip these colleges. But, reportedly, no appointment letters have yet been issued even after expiry of one year.

Here in Bangladesh, we do not attach importance to anything. We do not think about the pupils. The people of Rangpur district were demanding for the establishment of a full-fledged university in Carmichael College. Reportedly, on many an occasion ministers and heads of the government during their visit to the college shared the feeling for the necessity of a university and assured to look into the matter. But no assurance has seen any light as yet. The Carmichael College was

established during the British rule. The college has the prospects favourable for upgrading it into a full-fledged university. The people of northern Bangladesh who are usually poor are sending their sons/daughters to Dhaka, Mymensingh, Sylhet: Chittagong Khulna, Kushtia for higher studies while Rajshahi University alone cannot bear the load of the students of the entire

Similarly the Haji Danesh Agriculture College of Dinapur can easily be upgraded into an agricultural university. This college has enough area to accommodate an university. At present, the students of remote areas who want to build up their career in agriculture and other agro-based faculties are rushing to Mymensingh to take degree in their desired

The people of the area will be encouraged to send their wards for higher education if facilities at a cheaper cost are available at their door-steps. It is really most unfortunate that there is still only one fullfledged university for the whole of northern Bangladesh whereas facilities for higher studies have been more or less expanded in other parts of the country. Will the government look

into it? Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Kalabagan, Dhaka

### BTV's Eid special

Sir, The special Eid programmes telecast by the Bangladesh Television had rather disappointed the viewers. The Ananda Mela was not so attractive. Only the Eid special drama 'Dui Diner Duniya' by Amjad Hossain was entertaining. The drama has humorously depicted how mobile telephones are being misused/abused by the so-called

affluent and neo-society people who have become rich not through diligence but through back-door and black-money; illegally taking bank loan with no concern to re-pay the loan. In reality, stern action should be taken against the defaulters as it was shown in the last episode of the drama.

Meanwhile, it is sincerely expected that the BTV will pay more attention in producing programmes for the special occasions like Eid in the fu-

M Zahidul Hague Asstt Prof. BAI. Dhaka

### 17th BCS exam schedule

Sir, Bangladesh Public Service Commission's Secretary has recently (twice) rescheduled some examinations dates of 17th BCS for Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi centres through press note and refixed them on Friday instead of normal working days and postponed all examinations for London centre which was supposed to start on February 26. 1996, without mentioning any new dates.

Nowadays. Bangladesh has become a political turmoilprone country and no one can say what shall be there on tomorrow perhaps except Friday because Friday is a weekly holiday and also a prayer day for the Muslim community. So, no political party in Bangladesh perhaps puts any hartal or blockade programme on

Therefore, we the candidates fervently appeal to the authority for rescheduling all the remaining dates also on Friday instead of normal working days to relieve us of anxi

Igbal Ahmed 11/7. Iqbal Road, Dhaka

## Political Crisis: An Overview

by MA Mutaleb

HE 15 February elections in Bangladesh was held without resolving the stagnant political crisis. The political crisis and, especially, the recent elections have thrown politics almost in a blind alley reducing further the limited leeway available to the major political parties Now, the ruling party has declared that it was entitled to form the government as it had bagged majority seats of the parliament. Mainstream opposition political parties say that as the election was farcial, the government so formed would be illegal. According to the civil society, pacification and, normalisation of agitation are prerequisites to reverse the dangerously downward trend in the politics of Bangladesh Otherwise, the society itself may degenerate triggering a moré dangerous crisis.

Political climate was turbulent during the pre-poll period also. The Chief Election Commissioner said that elections should be held for constitutional continuity. Here he apparently became the selfproclaimed guardian of the Constitution. According to Article 7 of the constitution, 'all powers in the Republic belong to the people", and therefore, he should not have put "the people" in an atmosphere of steadly increasing violence and insecurity in the name of elections. Some eminent legal experts said that holding of elections within 90 days from the dissolution of the parliament was merely 'directory' 'and not "mandatory" Supreme Court is the final interpreter of the Constitution and other laws The President of Bangladesh could have referred the matter to the Supreme Court under Article 106 of the Constitution for its opinion The Chief Election Commissioner of

Bangiagesh could have tol

lowed a recent Indian precedent. 'A few months ago, the Prime Minister of India said that election would be hold in Kashmir very soon. The Chief Election Commissioner of India. Mr T N Sesan with his two colleagues travelled throughout Kashmir for assessment of the actual situation. On return to New Delhi he declared in a press conference, "Holding of elections in Kashmir is not possible as extreme violence provails there." On account of the extreme political crisis. country-wide violence, and insecurity it was perhaps the duty of the Chief Election Commissioner not to hold the elections. The question of Constitutional continuity could have been considered by the government, the political parties and the Supreme Court when referred to it.

Political crisis can never be solved by force. In West Bengal, political murders reached a figure of 1.200 in 1970. Troops were called in to help' the civil authorities in holding 'peaceful' elections Despite extensive patrolling by the troops. 120 deaths occurred and thousands were injured during the election campaign ing. Of course the political crisis of West Bengal was quite different from that of Bangladesh Yet that can be at

least a distant example The Chief Election Com missioner was the most pow erful man in Bangladesh as it appeared from his pre-poll pronouncements Army was called in to recover illegal arms and to help hold peaceful elections. Arms recovery drive was not successful as it appeared from subsequent reports and incidents. Report from different sources said that on the election day youer furnout was extremely ! w lowest in the firsters of elections in Bankindesh There was allegation of ballot staffing and

other gross irregularities including absence of presiding officers or polling agents. So election was neither genuine nor meaningful being not reflective of the opinion of the major segments of the population. Meaningful elections could not be held in a peaceful manner in an atmosphere surcharged with violence, fear and insecurity inspite of deployment of huge number of members of law enforcing agencies including the Army. unprecedented in Bangladesh elections. The whole electoral process did not comport with international standard for a truly electoral exercise, because "genuine elections" envisaged in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot be held without participation of the major segments of population

and major political parties. In the light of experience gathered from the 1988 parliamentary elections, the psychological effect of an idea that induced people to feel that except BNP other parties taking part in the elections were not known in the political field while the mainstream opposition parties boycotted the elections that BNP candidates were elected uncontested from 48 constituencies and would be elected as well from others even with lowest voter turnout and that violence would prevail resulting in chaos made people pessimistic about and kept them away from participating in the elec-

A definitive choice between genume elections promoting democracy and merely cos metic change which will not affect the stagnant position of status quo remains to be made by the major political parties for the good of the country and

The newless a prochamy