

What Next?

In a situation where politics is fast degenerating into a national catastrophe, the only silver-lining is that there is still a slim chance of a deal across the table.

The problem is there is little time for extensive communication between the two sides. From March 9, the combined opposition is starting its indefinite non-cooperation movement.

It is a testing time for all, only more so for the politicians. The opposition's tough conditions have their genesis in the past two years' experiences; but now is a time for taking stock of everything only with an eye on the future.

The basic principle of a caretaker government has been accepted by all. Now just extend the good work on the basis of the option that may not be the best but definitely the next best among the available at this moment.

The Historic Speech

Today is the seventh of March. A very special day for the Bengalee people. This day the millennium-old yearning of this ancient people to become free found its first expression.

If Rabindranath gave a central point to a multitude to become a people overcoming a thousand divides, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave them a rallying point for national freedom.

In the beginning of March, 1971 the society of the Bengalee people had been set afire by Pakistan treachery. On the Seventh afternoon Bangabandhu spoke of the struggle for freedom and independence and brought an end to the vacillations and archaic tendencies of a rudderless social vessel.

This day is not observed the way it should have been. For many are the detractors, including the successive governments after 1975, who would love to see this day written off the mind of the people.

Determining Culture

Pakistan's Senate is locked in a battle over the permissibility of televising folk dances participated by men and women having no legal relationship.

Who decides the culture of society? What has a political or religious leader to say in the matter? His or her opinion is only as good as that of another man in the street who, however, has better and more urgent things to give his thoughts to.

It has over the centuries become very clear that the so-called fundamentalists or dogmatists of all kind want all mankind to become an unending pack of foolish beasts remembering nothing creating nothing and evolving into nothing.

People's Sufferings Should End

by Nurul Kabir

parties usually mobilise their supporters from the adjoining districts to make their "grand rallies" in the capital a big success.

The strategy of confrontation becomes more evident when one sees that the opposition earlier shifted its target following the rescheduling of the date of the ruling party rally on the 7th of this month.

The opposition demand for dissolution of the so-called Sixth Jatiya Sangsad formed through an extensively rigged poll sounds logical to any rational people.

whether the government has submitted the text of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) to President Abdur Rahman Biswas, but we know that the controversial agreement signed by the government in 1994 had not been produced before the Parliament.

We admit that whipping in the House is the part and parcel of a parliamentary democracy, but leaving no room for voting according to one's conscience could in no way be said to be democratic.

There are other instances of ignoring the dictates of the Constitution by the government of Khaleda Zia.

making such statements. Perhaps the Awami League believes that an election held under a non-party government would pave way for its seizing the state power.

Then what is wrong with the opposition accepting the February 15 polls? We know the rational people believing in a classical democratic polity cannot accept the controversial polls.

But it should have nothing to do with the politicians belonging to the Awami League, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-Islami and their allies.

The Awami League should come forward to settle the issues with the BNP as soon as possible and try its luck in a poll to be conducted by its cherished non-party government. Such a path will strengthen democracy.

erally boycotted by more than eighty per cent of the voters, is really unacceptable to any democratic mind.

When, the BNP has shown little respect for some of the important provisions of the Constitution during its tenure since 1991, it is hard to believe that the party is committed to constitutionalism.

Article 39 of the Constitution has guaranteed "freedom of thought and conscience," and "freedom of speech and expression" of the citizens.

Article 145 (A) of the Constitution clearly obliges the government to produce the texts of all "international treaties" in Parliament.

of the Constitution promises that "the State shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women."

The government of Khaleda Zia had abolished the Upazila system, a thana level local government introduced by her previous regime, in 1991. But they are yet to replace it with a new one.

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regimes, and legitimised Parliaments constituted through rigged polls, in the name of "upholding the process of constitutional continuity" of the country.

When the opposition's principal demand is met, where is the bar for them to make efforts to translate Khaleda Zia's promises into reality, and spare the people further conflicts jeopardising their civil life?

The opposition has enforced 90 days of hartals and other activities in 1995 to press its demand for caretaker government.

ELECTORAL REFORMS

The Search for Democracy

ent constituencies in one day. Any logistics expert armed with a computer and a fleet of buses can do this, scaring the genuine voters away.

AS I SEE IT
Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

functionaries looting a bank in order that dacoits are prevented from attempting robbery. As far as giving minorities two votes is concerned, given the PPP's known history of attracting minority votes as an acceptable alternate in the face of conservative and religious parties, it is to be blatant a sleight-of-hand to even comment on this absurdity.

One has to follow three major principles in a free democracy. First is to have every electable post directly elected. Any indirect vote is open to manipulation and this negates the concept of democracy.

Secondly, we must have a majority vote to decide an election by having a run-off second election between the first two candidates with maximum votes if no single candidate has secured more than 50 per cent majority.

Thirdly, while we must have a Joint Electorate as a Separate Electorate it is divisive in nature and only serves to keep the minorities out of the national mainstream.

National Assembly has 200 seats directly elected, there must be an additional 100 seats on PR basis with at least 50 per cent for women and 15 per cent for minorities.

of each constituency there must be a formula devised which has to make a compromise between the land area and the population. This is a mechanism that can be agreed to in a spirit of give and take that corrects the imbalance of say 10,000-15,000 voters in a constituency in Balochistan to about half-million voters in a constituency in the urban areas.

Based on the above principles and given the sorry example of Bangladesh (where the two women are hell-bent on the nation self-destructing rather than trust each other to conduct a fair election), the general elections must be conducted by a Caretaker government comprising of the Judiciary and non-political individuals selected by the Judiciary. The Civil Administration and

7th of March 1971 was not an ordinary day like other days for the Bengalis. It was different and a very important day in the lives of the people living in the then East Pakistan.

On 7th of March '71, he was sure of himself. Hundreds of years of subjugation and ruthless exploitation of the Bengalis were coming to an end, his dream of a prosperous and emancipated Bengal was just around the bend.

He was gambling at enormous stakes with all that he had — he was gambling with his life. He would not compromise with anything, he would not budge an inch, his decision was final.

Armed Forces must comply with the dictates of the Judiciary in holding free and fair elections. March 23, 1996 is important in Pakistan as it constitutionally separates the Judiciary from the Executive, making them truly independent.

OPINION

The Voice of Thunder

With an uncanny sixth sense, he declared explicitly that "this time, the struggle was for liberation, this time the struggle was for independence" and that he would make the country's people free, Inshallah.

Like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar to a butterfly, that of East Pakistan to Bangladesh had begun. By the end of the speech, it was crystal clear that the very foundations of the two wings of Pakistan as one nation was shaken to the roots and virtually torn asunder.

Towards the end of the speech Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had driven the half a million crowd to near hysterical frenzy of Bengali nationalism, as he was an orator par excellence, a leader of common men — who appealed directly to them, and seemed to have an invisible bond between himself and the general mass.

One cannot believe that Ms. Benazir Bhutto is responsible for the absurdity of some of the proposed electoral reforms. This is certainly not the work of torchbearer of freedom and the champion of democracy that "we once knew. With grieving heart one must reluctantly accept that the person is the PM's House posing as the PM may not be the Ms Bhutto. We have to reluctantly accept what her mother and brother have repeatedly stated that this lady in the PM's House is a creation of (and a hostage to) the tyrannical forces that she herself fought valiantly for over a decade. For the sake of this nation, will the real Ms Benazir please forgive us and come back from wherever she has gone into hiding?"

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