

CEC and EC's Credibility

Justice Sadeq assumed his office as the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) amidst a storm of controversy. First sign of his political naiveté became apparent when he decided to accept the offer to become CEC without proper consultation with the opposition.

His next controversial move was the Act of God postponement of the by-elections to the seats falling vacant after the en masse resignation by the opposition. If his decision was questionable, his handling of it was disastrous, making him look, however unjustifiably, like a pawn in the hands of the government.

To his credit, we think the voters' registration went smoothly. Here again the claims of inaccuracy and false registration were not forcefully rebutted by the EC as it should have been.

Totally overshadowing his all other mistakes was his decision to go ahead with the one-party election. Once he saw that all negotiations had failed and that there was no option but to hold, at best, a highly questionable election or at worst, one that would lead to violence and possible killing, he should have either stopped holding it, or resigned, saying that he could not knowingly lead the country to civil unrest in the name of election.

The election that he has held is universally believed to have been rigged, and as such does not command any respectability, either at home or abroad. What Justice Sadeq can do now is to make a clean breast of everything and tell the people exactly what has happened in the elections. Questions have been raised about the validity of the whole process because elections to all 300 seats could not be held within the 90 days' mandatory period.

This Must Stop

This must stop. This shooting down people as if they were game birds or clay pigeons at the shooting range. Whatever the provocation — police or other law-enforcing elements shall not shoot people engaged in any form of political demonstration, that is the instruction we, and believably the whole of this nation, seek of the BNP government. They haven't proved over the five years of their tenure particularly given to heading counsel. But this present one is not so much a counsel. It is a demand. And they can ignore it only at their own peril.

About 70 persons have been shot dead by police or BDR personnel since the election-day eruption. The nation doesn't want anymore of it.

Ice has at last been broken and the national dialogue, the absence of which had pushed the nation to virtual ruination — materially and more importantly, in its society-sustaining socio-cultural sinews — is now on. Should the dialogue continue while the nation burns? Or could not the dialogue be made more meaningful and positively advancing towards a grand national reconciliation with the appropriate setting of a softened and helpful climate — with the cessation of a recourse to shooting and mass lathi-charge and teargassing?

But for this to have any significantly beneficial effect will necessarily take two sides — just as it takes two hands to clap. The opposition must call a respite to their continued asahajog. It is their men who are being killed and it is state property — the people's very own property that their activists are destroying. They must contribute to the expectations from this dialogue by calling a halt to violent demonstrations.

The opposition has come to the ultimate in its arsenal — and which is also its last shot indeed. Why spend it foolishly? Keep it for the time when you may need it more — and we all join you in praying that such a time never comes.

Ludicrous Business

There was a strange piece of news in yesterday's press. More strange than incredible. All buses venturing to ply during the asahajog will be given 20 litres of fuel a day — free that is from government coffers. Under what account the government will place the hefty bills and who among the auditors and comptrollers will accept these spendings? Who is going to monitor what the buses are going to do with the free fuel? If one bus tries to be honest to its less than 300 taka worth dole by way of fuel and is broken by agitators, no doubt that damage would also be made good by the government. So who is there to stop a regular business of ramshackle buses reporting as being broken by agitation and getting fat compensation? The idea is to break the continued spell of a metropolis without a single motorised vehicle plying its streets — for days on end. The one crore taka in compensation and the 20 litres in advance everyday will all fail to do the trick. But we assure the government that both the compensation fund and the tonnes of fuel would be evaporating without leaving a trace of effect.

Politics and National Interest

by Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah

WE, the Bengalees, are a very proud people. We take pride in our thousand-year old language, our cultural heritage, our refined taste and above all our intellect. Gokhale, the venerable Indian leader of the time of rise of Indian nationalism, said "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow."

To-day, many people are wondering whether we really deserve the epithet which the Indian leader ascribed to us. No doubt, we, in this part of Bengal, were able to attain nationhood, after centuries of colonial domination following a sanguinary war of liberation so valiantly fought by our people in 1971. This, perhaps, is a unique case in the history of this sub-continent. Things haven't shown up brightly, however, since independence much to the chagrin of the general mass of the population. Our hopes for a better and a fuller life have been belied.

While this is so, to-day the society itself rests divided into two opposite camps. It is not our intention to enter into a debate as to why such a painful state of affairs plaguing our national life has arisen but the fact remains that this poor nation of ours does not seem to be agreeing on anything. This is not only sapping the energy of the people but is striking also at the very root of our existence.

True, the situation here is not identical with that of Nepal. But at the same time it is not true that the uncertainty

which has enveloped the entire political environment for more than two years now has been causing irreparable damage to the country's interest. For one thing, how many deaths have occurred due to violence in recent months? In a civilized society even one death of an innocent citizen is regarded as one too many.

The significant developments that ensued were the statements of the leaders of the ruling party and the opposition declaring their latest policy and plans of action. The Prime Minister, formally through a letter, entered into a dialogue for the specific purpose of agreeing to the nature and framework of an interim (caretaker) non-partisan government to conduct parliamentary election and also to decide upon the timing to hold the next election.

The erstwhile leader of the opposition is yet to reply to the letter formally. But she made clear the opposition stand that the February 15 election is illegal, formation of the resultant parliament and the government is, therefore, invalid and the Prime Minister must quit office immediately.

What we are trying to say is simply this. That there will be differences of opinion is accepted. Honest differences of opinion can actually act as lubricant to the wheel of social progress. But always acting at cross-purposes may harm the country's interests.

An objective analysis of the propositions and demands of the two sides suggests existence of a number of common elements as well as wide differences on certain other issues. The principal point of agreement was on the issue of an interim, neutral, non-partisan caretaker government un-

Silver Lining Around Dark Clouds!

by M M Rezaul Karim

THE violent storm that raged during the election, bringing in its trail death, destruction and loss, has since lessened to some extent. This, however, has not averted the danger of further distress of the people and damage to the national economy, specially in the wake of the call for continuous hartal and non-cooperation by the opposition parties.

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two sides has since met with the opposition counter proposal to hold consultations among principal political parties under the aegis of the President as 'Head of State'. The reluctance of the opposition leaders to negotiate directly with the Prime Minister or her colleagues appears incomprehensible, as the latter has not yet been elected as Prime Minister by the new parliament, which the opposition does not wish to recognise as such. On the contrary, the Prime Minister has been functioning as an interim or caretaker Prime Minister as per specific provisions of the constitution since the dissolution of the last parliament and with whom or whose representatives the opposition has been directly negotiating since.

Anyways, irrespective of the motivation, the very fact of the willingness of the opposition to negotiate in order to reach an amicable settlement testifies to the political sagacity of their leader and the impact of profuse friendly advice from home and abroad. The positive response of the ruling party to the suggestion of conducting negotiations under the auspices of the President also indicates political acumen and sincere desire of the government leader to reach a pacific and honourable settlement.

The general mass of people, whose distress is accelerating at a fast pace and almost reaching unbearable limit, meanwhile, is gasping alternatively with hopes and apprehensions at the sight of a flickering light at the end of the tunnel. Let the Hon'ble President of the Republic as well as our respected political leaders rise to the occasion and devise ways and means to rescue the nation from the quagmire of despair and misery. A suspension of the current non-cooperation movement would no doubt be welcome by all, establish a congenial atmosphere and facilitate the process immensely. Let the dark clouds hovering overhead threatening devastating storms turn into blissful rain and shower those underneath to establish peace, restore stability and promote common good of the people.

The regular column ENCHIRIDION will be published tomorrow

What is the future of Bangladesh?

Sir, Sixth parliamentary election was held on 15th February, 1996. The headlines in newspapers were: "Voters' turnout extremely low", and the like. But what can one expect with life-threatening hanging, bombs exploding, bullets flying and people subjected to all sorts of harassment. I am surprised that even a few dared to go to the polling centres to cast their votes! They must be uncommonly courageous.

What a mess our politicians have made! We, the common people, are the most affected by it. People are blaming both the parties. They think Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia should have agreed to hold the election under a neutral caretaker government and it must have been possible if she really wanted to.

Cuba's crime

Sir, the Downing of two civilian planes is a crime committed by Cuba, which can hardly be condoned. However, Cuba is not the first country to have introduced this barbarous and macabre act against humanity. Two similar dastardly acts of enormous violence have previously been committed by both the USA and the now-defunct USSR.

Saidpur bypass road

An appeal to the opposition leaders

Sir, As a conscious citizen of this country, I have been keeping a close eye on the political situation here. It is disputable whether the demand for a neutral caretaker government to conduct the next general election is justifiable or not.

Politics and session jam

Sir, The present political impasse is terribly deteriorating the country's educational system. Already there are prevailing session jams in almost all the universities and educational institutions of the country. Now it takes more than one year, in some cases two to three years, to complete one academic year by a student.

Cadet Colleges

Sir, In the article published under the above heading in the Focus page of your esteemed daily dated 28th February 1996, it has been mentioned that the cadet colleges are kept operating under defence budget.

OPINION

Who is Digging Whose Grave?

by A M M Shahabuddin

ISH always strikes from head downwards, so goes the saying. But what about the big 'political fishes' of our country? They seem to stink from head to foot at a time when they are out to grab or retain power at any cost.

Outdated, Dreamy Politicians

The bitter and pessimistic commentary by a young businessman (Land of Dreams, Star, March 2) should be compulsory reading by all our political leaders, and then by the bureaucrats. This type of frustration and discouragement is prevalent today in almost all the sectors of the society.

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Today the political leaders are fighting among themselves, and the state of the nation is as unstable as ever. The gloomy scenario is not at all inspiring for those who would like to get into the business world professionally. The world has witnessed a bottomless basket for a quarter of a century. The future does not look bright with the seemingly topos brass hats of our political brass hats who can neither help themselves, nor others. A silly question crops up: Bangladesh is for whom? Do the silent majority sweat to earn the bread for others?

Since the politicians also came from the same have-not society, naturally the priority went to the governors (the politicians, who else) than to the governed. This vicious exercise has been going on since 1947, and reformed since 1971, with autocratic breaks. Unstable and inept political leadership is still staggering