The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, March 15, 1996

Primacy of the Economy

'A World Bank report reveals that in 1995 Bangladesh pulled off a record Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of 125 million US dollars. This represents a one thousand per cent growth in this category of capital inflow from a paltry 11 million dollars in 1994. Compared to India's 1.2 billion and Pakistan's 400 million our share of 125 million is not small in view of the size of our economy. That we have been a beneficiary of the South Asian boom in FDIs owing to the progress of the economic reform agenda in the region should make us happy but hardly celebrative.

The cautious optimism is bred by two factors. Firstly, we are yet to become a home to FDIs in the sense that India in particular and Pakistan to some extent have turned out to be. Secondly, the size-ofthe-economy criterion is somewhat diluted when one takes into account Sri Lanka's FDI figure of 200m in comparison with ours of 125m. Furthermore, the island country's ethnic turmoil notwith, standing, they had a larger share of foreign direct investment in 1995 than we managed to attract. These are not grudging but educative comparisons meant to draw lessons from. If Bangladesh and Sri Lanka did not have their political troubles and the absorption capacity of their economies were larger they would have accounted for a greater inflow of FDI to be sure.

Bangladesh's privatisation programme and legal reform in the financial sector have lacked the locomotion of a robust political will drawing on a bipartisan consensus. When our political parties have locked their horns in matters so basic as the holding of a democratic election attaining the desired degree of bipartisanism to propel the engine of economic reform may sound like a tall order. But this would be quite achievable in not-too-distant a future provided our political parties make it a point — and a habit — from now on to prioritise the national economy in their political arguments. Economic development has to be the pole-star for national politics. This is what it has become in the rest of the world and we shall only have ourselves to blame if we are left by the wayside at the dawn of the 21st century because of our suicidal love for outmoded politics.

When the portfolio investment and the ODA are slumping, FDI is our only hope. To attract more of this there is no alternative to placing the economic agenda ahead of politicking.

Cricketing Disgrace ·

Never before did crowd-trouble bring a World Cup cricket match to a premature conclusion and more importantly to such disgrace. Shame of shames, the bizarre cricketing history was made by none other than the Calcutta crowd known to be highly knowledgeable and appreciative of cricket. The controversies amidst which the tournament began following the refusal of Australia and West Indies to play in Sri Lanka are not going to die down after what has happened in the Eden Gardens. Definitely the detractors of staging the World Cup in South Asia have been given a long handle and this is despite the commercial success by the PILCOM in organising the tournament.

Apart from politics in sport, there are other. more genuine reasons why the aberration of sporting behaviour has to be condemned. Cricket dubbed to be a gentleman's game has been brought to disrepute by the largest and one of the most sporting crowds in the world. The Eden Gardens turned into a huge cauldron after a miserable performance by the Indian cricketing heroes. The 110,000 spectators who had gathered in the commodious stadium could not in their wildest imagination think of a gutless capitulation of the home-side at the knock-out stage.

The players did very badly and on a given-day the better team can only hope to win. But several among the spectators behaved most irrationally. Sportsmanship makes it incumbent upon both the players and the spectators to accept defeat in good grace.

For once the Eden Gardens crowd has been carried away to commit a despicable act. Let this not happen anywhere in the sub-continent in the future. Before the glaring eyes of the world we become smaller both as cricketing fans and man by giving such an account of ourselves. The fracas at Eden Gardens should be a lesson for everybody involved with sports.

A Monstrous Act

It is baffling to know that a man with a past record of a scout leader and a chief of a boys' club could kill five or six-year old school children in a frenzied outburst of temper. Sixteen young lives and two adults perished, score of others received bullet injuries when the man opened fire on the children who assembled at a school gymnasium: Neighbours claim he was fond of fire arms and lived a secluded life. Not anyone is aware of his criminal record.

The question is why did he commit such a monstrous act? The man no longer lives to answer the question for he killed himself soon after shooting down the children. And there can be no one else who can give a better explanation of his motive than he himself could. If the bits and pieces of information about him are pieced together the facts that come out are: he was a loner and wanted unsuccessfully to get back the job of scouting leadership he had held.

Even his loneliness and frustration do not quite explain his weird behaviour. Was he jealous of the blissful life of the children? We will perhaps never know. But it surely is a manifestation of the mon-

ster of dehumanisation, The tragedy that befell the Scottish town has shocked people the world over, because the incident points to the defects of our social system.

Total Rejection of Hamas' Peace Offer was a Mistake ERRORISTS' bomb is The fact that Yahya Ayash was not the only bomb maker was clear when another suicide bomb exploded

perhaps more dangerous than nuclear bomb because the former is used by terrorists to kill people and the later will probably not be used ever again. In the last week of February a powerful bomb blew up a civilian bus in Jerusalem killing 26 people practically all were Israelis. This bomb was Hamas' reply to assassination of its leader Yahya Ayash by a booby trap set up by Israeli secret service. The killing of 26 people was terrible and senseless as none of the dead was responsible for the murder of Yahya Ayash. After whis attack on a Jerusalem bus Hamas made a peace offer — a conditional one however, saying that Hamas will no more attack civilians and civilian targets in Israel if Israel stops attacking Hamas members and releases Hamas prisoners in Israeli jail. Hamas gave eight days time to the Israeli government to respond.

Interestingly, the assassination of Yahya Ayash, an alleged expert bomb maker, took place suddenly after nearly six months of lull in Hamas attacks on Israelis. Reportedly the decision to kill Yahya Ayash was cleared by Prime Minister Shimon Peres who is known to be a peace man. Whoever has cleared this, it was a wrong decision as this provoked Hamas into retaliation. By killing Yahya Ayash Israel could not get rid of bomb makers There must be hundreds of such bomb makers in such terrorist organisations. Moreover. the killing of Yahya Ayash on January 5 thwarted Arafat's efforts to bring Hamas into the peace process - indeed this

was about to disrupt the Palesuman election that took place

on January 20. The fact that Yahya Ayash was not the only bomb maker was clear when another suicide bomb exploded exactly one week after on March 3 in Western Jerusalem on the same No 18 bus line killing 19 Israelis and injuring many others. Hamas said it carried out the attack as Israel immediately rejected its peace offer.

Israel rejected Hamas peace

offer saying it would not deal with a terrorist organisation. For decades PLO itself was considered by Israel as a terrorist organisation but Israel did deal with PLO and signed a peace agreement. The world has not forgotten that many Israelis including their leaders belonged to several terrorist organisations for years before Israel was planted in the Middle East. Two points need to be considered here. Any peace offer from an enemy whether involved in open or secret war (terrorism) should receive due consideration. Secondly, this offer did mention negotiations through Palestinian authority and as such Israel was not required to deal with Hamas terrorist directly. Hamas' offer was not unreasonable. They wanted no attack on them in return for no attack by them on Israeli civilians which was most important for Israelis.

Hamas' peace offer had several important implications for both Palestinians and Israelis:

exactly one week after on March 3 in Western Jerusalem on the same No 18 bus line killing 19 Israelis and injuring many others. Hamas said it carried out the attack as Israel immediately rejected its peace offer.

Spotlight on Middle East Muslehuddin Ahmad

(I) The most important one was that this could lead to permanent halt in terrorism in the area against civilians and civilian targets - attacks, if any, against military could be effectively dealt with by Israeli military or even be later negotiated for total halt in Hamas terrorism. (2) This would have boosted the peace process as Hamas' opposition to the peace process would have practically stopped. (3) This would have made Palestinian politics more peaceful and democratic with Hamas joining the democratic opposition. (4) Any halt in the terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians would have boosted political position of Shimon Peres and his Labour Part which is committed to peace. The successive terrorist attacks have erased Shimon Peres's big lead in opinion poll. (5) If Hamas could be formally brought into the political process, the other smaller terrorist groups would have gradually disappeared. (6) This also would have reduced terrorist activities considerably in the South Lebanon areas. (7) The countries supporting terrorism would have lost one big dedi-

cated group with a large number of derailed young minds the suicide bombers. (8) Finally, with practically no terrorism the process of integration of the two people - Israelis and Palestinians - would have got a boost which was absolutely necessary for Middle East peace. But unfortunately, obstinacy and arrogance of Israeli authority prevailed and the peace offer ensuring safety of the civilians received no consideration. On moral point, one may argue against dealing with terrorists but in this unjust world the moral considerations do not seem to play any important role in any political decision-making process.

The immediate result of Israeli rejection of Hamas' peace offer has been a disaster - another suicide bomb attack in the "crowd of people and cars" in Tel Aviv killing at least 12 people. There was an immediate call from Israeli President for suspension of the peace process. Obviously, Israeli opposition also demanded a halt in the peace negotiations with Palestinians. This is exactly what the Hamas bomb blasts were intended for - halt in

the peace process. The suspension of the peace process would mean playing into Hamas' hand.

The war declared by Shi-

mon Peres on Hamas to improve his political image at home may temporarily halt terrorist attacks as main leaders will either be arrested already three leaders listed by CIA are in custody of Palestinian authority - or go underground but this will further deepen the animosity between Israelis and Palestinians and force more young Palestinians to go for suicide bombings. Indeed, they are too many and too oppressed in the hands of Israelis and no war can stop them. Indeed, the present war against Hamas by Israeli army and Palestinian security forces. which was apparently forced to join the war to save the peace process, has seriously diminished any chance of bringing Hamas into Palestinian political process. Now Arafat will face serious political and security problem within his selfrule area.

Israeli action against Hamas and mobilisation of Israeli forces within West Bank villages proved to the Palestinians that the present peace process brought nothing to them in terms of their selfrule let alone freedom. Israeli authority said, it was free to move into West Bank and Gaza any time it wanted. This has considerably tarnished Arafat's image as President of Palestinian authority for self-rule area of West Bank and Gaza.

Israel blames Arafat for his inability to stop these suicide

bombings but Israeli authorities lorget that these bombings have been taking place within Israeli territories and indeed in the heart of Tel Aviv and Israeli security could do nothing about it. When Israeli authorities could not even stop their Prime Minister's assassination by their own man why should they blame Arafat for not being able to stop terrorism within Israeli territories? It is now possible that Israeli right wing militants will join hands with Hamas terrorists to destroy the peace process!

However, as political damage is already being done and Palestinian authority has joined the crackdown on Hamas, it has not alternative but to go all the way and round up all leaders and activists and destroy all of their infrastructure for terrorism regardless of the political implications. Arafat must tell and indeed try to convince about two million Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza that this action was necessary to save them from repeated collective punishment inflicted on them by Israel for Hamas terrorism. When Palestinian authority is already in action Israel must withdraw from West Bank villages and lift sea blockade and border closure quickly.

World experiences have shown that terrorism based on deep-rooted political subjugation and exploitation cannot be stopped by force, it has to be dealt with by attacking its root cause. South Africa is the brightest example. Some realisation is already there on Northern Jerusalem issue. And in Middle East it is Israeli occupation. If Israel withdraws completely from the occupied territories, the root cause will disappear and along with it terrorism will also disappear.

KZ should Meet SH

by Chintito

T is the nature of my job to remain secretive. And, not a lot many people really know who I am. But. ever since I began filling up the columns with POS (Pinch of Salt), the few who do have often asked me to explain my name. Well, I can't hold it any longer and here it is: Chintito deciphered stands for Character Having Inherent Nature To Irritate The Others.

Much as you dislike it. cannot be credited for innovating abbreviations. They have been here ever since someone wanted to cut short a conversation. And, that was immediately after the first sentence was ever uttered.

The chaps in the Army do it the best. They condense almost everything. The moment you walk into any cantonment. abbreviations pop up from almost everywhere. PQ this way. MQ that way. And, if you are actually keen and keep your ears open, you might even catch some of their verbals. They are simply brilliant. With a solemn face, a Colonel may command a Captain: "Go to YB and get the LR to have MCD for TM". Don't ask me to RPT that. But, there's also no need to fret about such apparently intangible chit-chat. All that the Colonel Saab was telling his junior to do was : Go to Your Bhabi and get the

Laundry Receipt to have My Clothes Delivered for tomorrow's Parade. Imagine all the TTS; time they save. The Americans have been

practising the art for many years. As a matter of fact, previously Presidents got elected to the White House only if they had sweet-sounding acronyms. Remember JFK who was succeeded by LBJ? They, of course, stopped it when they came to Ronald Reagan because RR sounded like some forgetful President repeating himself err... err...

We are always lovingly shortening each other's names. Like Salahuddin is Sallu and Suchorita is Suchi or, more tenderly. Shoe. No matter how small a name is, love can always truncate it further. The bigger the love, the smaller the name. That's one reason why persons married for many years do not call each other any more. Like Putul's husband calls her Putu, but when he want's a special favour it is simply a Poo. Of course, Putul can strike back with a Noo.

Sometimes the full name of an organisation is based on the

pre-selected acrostic version. It is good for business. If someone fancies MIT for his proposed school, all he has to do is enlarge it to Madaripur Institute of Technology. IBM could be someone's idea for Idrakpur Bachelors' Mess, and so on

It may occasionally be necessary to camouflage the real appellation of a company because it is too, well, rather complicated. For example the ad firm AAA may really be hiding the true Akkas Ali Associ-

Often the full title may be lost to an abbreviation which has become famous by usage. It might be awfully unfair on the rickshaw-puller to ask him how much he would charge for a ride to the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. But, ask him about BUET and his face will lighten up : heida koyben tho! This is true not only for English words. The Savar bus conductor will surely drop you at BKSP, but Bangladesh Krira Shikya Protishtan will make

him drop his jaw. Every profession has abridgements, not so much as to make their work efficient as making their profession look impressive to the unsuspecting outsider. The way to tackle such jargonistic people is to ignore them. I am sure you will HNP, have no problem. SAB Sorry about that. See what I

There are, of course, useful acronyms such as RADAR (radio direction and range) LASER (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation), etc. But, somewhere along the line, we got carried away. There is this Hindi song GTH, Baba GTH, which actually translates to Go to the hell Baba Go to hell.

The whole thing is not really that simple. For abbreviations to work, the code must be common to both parties. Take, for instance, this now very popular people's demand KZ should meet SH to discuss BD issues. I know what you mean, you know what I mean, everyone possibly think it is too obvious and straightforward to mean anything else. There lies the problem.

It is the curse on this nation that, unfortunately, to the TWO (two women obdurates) who matter, all that it means is Kazi Zafrullah should meet Senator Harris to discuss Buying Debenture issues.

D for Disgusting!

OPINION

Politicians

A large number of opinions have appeared in the press commenting on the political confrontation, suggesting possible remedies, by going into the nuts and bolts of the issue - but quickly bypassing the main principle and the motivation of the campaign by the main group of opposition parties, who, suspiciously got together and hatched a plan, and suddenly during the middle of the term, proposed a procedure, outside the constitution, sus-

tions may not be fair. The party in power has been made the scapegoat. whereas the role of the real culprit, namely the society, has been ignored (what is visible is noticed - a tree is visible, not the roots). The removal of the party in power will not solve the problem. The malaise of corruption is deeply entrenched in the present society.

pecting that the polling dur-

ing the next general elec-

The accusation appears to be naive and opportunistic. and is devoid of statesmanship. The motivation, in the name of democracy and public interest, is suspect. The idea of a caretaker government may be all right, but the manner of implementing it is suspicious. A solution is sought in the street, outside the House. In fact, the very act of resigning as MPs cannot be appreciated by the majority of the voters who elected these representatives. Where is the mandate of resign? This question cannot be answered clearly and satisfactorily. It is also not

clear to many how and why the street agitations are better than fighting inside the parliament.

The present agitation is based on violence may be through hired musclemen who destroy the property of innocent people who are not engaged in the fight between the political parties. The cult of violence is not condemned, but when the police act, it is immediately condemned. The offending leaders are perfectly aware that confrontation invites violence. Looking for an excuse to create a law and order situation is easy: controlling it is difficult and sensitive. Preying on mass psychology is to be condemned in every quarter. Self-seekers are not

If the constitution is treated in this manner, as is evident, then a precedent is created, which will be repeated later by other parties in the future. The opposition claim it is the view of the majority of the voters. Statistics can be made to lie.

The solution to look for is that a third bloc has to be created to control the unbridled misuse of power by the politicians whether in power or in the opposition. Will a bicameral system help? This type of extreme dictatorial and autocratic behaviour by the errant and irresponsible political leaders must be curbed through strong public opinion lobbies. The citizens have given them 25 years' time, but they are still bungling. No more, please!

Should an ad hoc system be included in the constitution?

Sir, Much dust has been raised and many graves have been dug by us, only for the idea of a neutral caretaker government (NCG). The combined opposition picked up this cue to push an apple of discord from the House of the Nation to the people in the street. They remained at loggerheads - one to remain in the power and the others to regain that. In the melee. many neo-terrorisms (unethical use of materials at the entrances, disrobing in public, profaning the solemnness of the holy month, complete disregard for the poor mass's earning and feeling for Eid celebration, introducing "gono-curfew" and "asohojog without definition known to the mass) have come to stay in the life of our posterity.

. On all these, a section of print media remained silent another section perhaps fanned the flames of their masters' voice and choice, while others like The Daily Star tried to bring back the sanity, amity and the understanding among the involved paranoiacs. Yet, without soulsearching, each party blamed the other for the people's sufferings. Whereas, both the parties are equally to be

blamed for the entire drama. In the last asohojog, if the print media or the electronic media had taken an impartial opinion poll, then it would have reflected that many did not follow directives of either side, but followed their own discretion as precautionary measure. Similarly on the NCG, besides the mainstream opposition, others are there who may have their opinion as citizens. So, to have an undisputed reflection of people's mind, a referendum must be held on NCG.

ing to one party and panacea to the others. In fact, it is an ad hoc arrangement. When a transition from one political system to another, or where a government has failed (for feudal, ethnic or any other political reasons), as an ad hoc arrangement, an interim government is installed for an impartially supervised poll. So. for a transition from one democratic government to the

It seems, NCG is frighten-

next (under same democracy). need for a disposable NCG in the constitution is not fully understood. I hope, the intellectuals and the constitutional experts would examine all the pros and cons, before the amendment, to avoid any misinterpretation and irritations thereof.

Besides this, as per the concept, NCG is responsible for a free and fair poll. After poll, the elected dejure government will take over from the NCG. The dejure will not be trusted to hold election (at least for 3-4 terms). So after take over of dejure government from NCG, how and who will hold a by-election of Magura syndrome? Or, will, there be two governments working side by side? Or. maybe a provision of a nonpartisan President in the constitution will work better and be easier to find, than a number of non-partisan for an NCG and to work with.

A R Choudhury Uttara, Dhaka .

Let there be some light

Sir, Recently, on the eve of the election, our hon'ble Pres ident was kind enough granting a rare, exclusive interview to the editors and journalists with him. He discussed the prevailing crisis of the country very frankly. At one stage, he reportedly told the journalists that he himself, being an advocate by profession, had gone through the Constitution, page by page. We take this in full confidence.

But as an ordinary citizen, would dare ask, in which page of the Constitution one may find legality or validity of such a voterless one-party election. held on 15 February, 1996 conducted by the Chief Election Commissioner, under strict security but against stiff resistance of the mainstream opposition parties and reportedly amidst tremendous voterigging and violence?

Moreover, the hon'ble President was learnt to have assured the journalists that he would call all major political parties before the 15th Feb election and try to exert his influence upon them for an

amicable solution to the crisis. so that all the parties could take part in the election avoiding confrontation. Being the Head of the State, he could easily do it, and all the political parties would have honourably responded to his call. But unfortunately, he did not do it ultimately, deviating from his assurance.

The common people of the country know it well that the Constitution of a democratic country is generally flexible and is meant for welfare of the people, but in no way are the people meant for the Constitution. The Constitution is not a holy book. It can easily be amended for the greater national interest. Needless to mention that our Constitution has already been amended so many times, often even for some very petty purpose. When such is the fact, then why our Prime Minister is still so binding to the ambit of the Constitution?

As an ordinary citizen, it is at least known to me that the President, on account of his highest position, should remain completely neutral and above any party politics. All the people of the country, irrespective of party affiliations are equal in his eyes. Similarly. the Chief Election Commissioner also should have been neutral, by all means. But, unfortunately, earlier the hon'ble President maintained silence and now the CES doesn't say anything conclusive on the socalled election.

Before concluding may cite two specific examples: 1) The Ex-President Zail Singh of India refused to sign a controversial file moved by the then Prime Minister late Rajib

2) The present Indian Chief Election Commissioner rejected the instruction of the government of Prime Minister P V Narashimha Rao, to conduct election in the state of Jammu and Kashmir apprehending serious rigging and violence in the present situation there.

Our hon'ble President, and the Chief Election Commissioner may kindly do something to salvage the suffering

M A Lais Green Road, Dhaka'

Light at the end

Sir, Thanks to the politician's! There seems to be a sparkle of light at the end of the tunnel. All parties concerned showing their belated sensitiveness to the 'little people's suffering deserve some appreciation. There has been no defeat nor victory for any group or individual. The nation has suffered and now there is a sigh of relief. Let us hope, in this spirit of accommodation. an understanding will be reached for the better of the nation and democracy and the nation will be allowed to move

As the nation prepares for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the great Liberation War, let us pledge to that "spirit of Liberation War" which had once united us to achieve a nationhood with a lot of, gore and glory. Let that spirit guide us through this hard time and move us forward to a better future.

Akku Chowdhury Banani, Dhaka

Let the President save

Sir. Where are we going? What is our future? We don't know. We, the general people, have been facing a crucial and critical political situation. Our social, economic and educational life has become terrible for this 'man-created' problem. Not only the government but also the opposition do not think the problem of the pecple. They only think of power. Our country's condition deteriorates owing to their obstinacy. This mentality doesn't suit politicians. Because they are our pioneers. We expect from our pioneers some

amount of magnanimity. Anyway, we want to be relieved of this terrible situation. Personally I think perhaps resignation of this government and cancellation the 15 February farcical election may relieve us of this critical problem. At this moment maybe our honourable President can save our country and nation. Then it is high time he took over the responsibility. Let him save us with his constitutional power

Syed Saif Saddam BAF Shaheen College Chittagong

People's Fate Remains

John Arun Sarkar

Now that the President has initiated dialogue with the opposition parties and the ruling party, people are hopeful that something will be done to break the prevailing political impasse. But it is frustrating that whatever is going on, it is for the sake of election and formation of government without visible concern for good governance.

It may be recalled that the present Government was fairly elected but people have been dismayed by its poor governance and failure in ensuring safety and security of life and

property. On the other hand, fairly defeated opposition parties also failed to take the defeat in good spirit and have spent the whole tenure engaging in bids to topple the government. They have totally failed to rise to the demands of the people.

Let's put aside the complex economic and political issues and take the views of laymen. What do we get?

 Almost regularly somebody is getting gang-raped and the criminals are moving freely in the broad day light threatening the victim and her relations to refrain from any legal courses and the police plays an indifferent role (as reported in the newspapers)

2. Every now and then somebody is getting killed by miscreants (many a time by the well known goons and hoodlums) but reportedly they are not arrested or brought to book. Police inactions in such cases are regularly reported in

the press. 3 Dacoities and hijackings are rampant but seldom one is ever caught for such wrong

4. Youngsters are reported to brandish arms/weapons and extort money fearlessly but people cannot get help from

the law enforcing agencies. The list may turn endless but the point to be noted is that neither the government has taken any appropriate steps to curb crimes and bring criminals to book nor the opposition has taken tough stand siding with the mass for correction of the situation and mitigation of the suffering.

In this connections, we may also note the role played by the foreign diplomats, envoys and emissaries. They took initiative to solve the deadlock between the government and the opposition parties but without focusing on the long-term solution mechanism.

From above, it is clear that whoever goes to power (election being fair or unfair) good governance (with absolute authority) is not at all ensured/promised.

Therefore, at this moment of crisis leaders in government and opposition as well as leading lawyers and thinkers should formulate a mechanism to rein the mad horse of autocratic-type governance.

In this respect, we may look at the USA and India where the President and Prime Minister are also not above law - they are summoned by the court and investigated against, if required and investigating agencies are freed from their controls for fair investigation, if required.

Is it too much to expect a device like that in our coun-