

Thank You, Sri Lanka

A thousand million eyes and more in the dozen and odd cricketing countries saw on Sunday history being made on the miniscreen. No, not all world championships or even the Olympics make history as did the final of the Sixth World Cup cricket between Sri Lanka and Australia. In Bangladesh we counted it as a rare privilege to see a small nation rise to world eminence with sure-footed ease and grace and a crowning humility. And the Sri Lankan achievement, made visibly in a matter of hours but indeed coming at the end of decades of assiduous cultivation, had in it lessons galore for us to imbibe.

History was made when an outsider — coming about the last in all earlier World Cup outings — clinched the tournament and did it by chasing and won the encounter by a vast seven wickets. These are what they did and what is recordable and already recorded. But more important was the way they did all this and much more.

Both in technique and talent as well as in recorded performance it were the Aussies who had been leading the field — overwhelmingly — this time. The highest that could be said of the Sri Lankans was that they were not wanting in any department. Then what subtle factor decided the match in the underdog's favour — and so decisively? The simple answer is spirit shot with grit that comes from character. Spirit that makes one man of eleven.

A news agency report said 'the contest was clean — clinical'. Yes, the Lahore match will be remembered long as a high expression of the spirit of cricket. It was cricket there from beginning to finish.

Ranatunga added vitality to this spirit by not allowing standard cricketing lore woven around winning the toss and choosing batting or fielding and about pitch and ball and light condition to bother him the least. The ball was there to be hit or caught and the wicket to be spreadeagled.

And there was the de Silva factor that made the difference. The Sixth Cup final will be christened the de Silva final. It was aesthetic experience of the highest order to watch him treat the ball — every ball.

It is gratifying to see that of the Six World Cricket Cup tournaments three have been won by nations of the subcontinent. This they have done before England and New Zealand. Now when will a fourth subcontinental nation make it to the tournament and eventually win it? Sri Lanka will be a perpetual source of inspiration for the cricketers of Bangladesh. If they can, why not we — is no more an audacious thought for us. Thank you, Sri Lanka.

US Assistance

It seems that a USAID squeeze is knocking at the doors of Bangladesh. This sordid possibility lurks following a US Congress-imposed cap on social sector expenditure by the Clinton administration. In real terms, this could mean a stoppage of food aid under PL-480 to Bangladesh up to September, 1997 and a rationed flow of aid to some other development projects here.

This is what Bangladesh and some other countries perhaps are reaping from the tussle between the Democrat administration of President Clinton and the Republican-dominated Congress over ways to balance the US budget. In passing, it is worthwhile to recall also that the US government's contributions to multilateral development financing agencies were not spared cut-back bids from the US legislature. On this score, as well as on the possibility of any alteration in the US role as the second largest bilateral donor to Bangladesh, after Japan, we have to look to the upcoming Presidential election in the USA for a change in the perspective. We are basically keeping our fingers crossed there in a vastly changed international scenario where camp politics has yielded place to confusing multipolarity and compassionate spoon-feeding to exacting standards of integration with the global market.

For the present, we have to carry some points with the US government in the event that the food aid is stopped and the flow of project aid is diminished. Our foreign currency reserve had earlier come under pressure due to food imports and this is going to be more so as further cereal deficit lies in store due to production losses. If the US food aid is completely withdrawn, needless to say, the misfortune will be compounded terribly. So, the US administration may help us retain a reasonably comfortable foreign currency reserve to underpin the macro-economic stability by giving us a relief in terms of debts repayment.

Simultaneously, cereals production and internal resource mobilisation need to be stepped up by means of some special measures.

More Ports

Chittagong port remains troubled. It is sought to be administratively resuscitated. An ultimatum had been issued from Singapore that if things did not improve by March 19, foreign shipping lines would boycott the port. Under the 'non-cooperation movement' of the opposition an all-party action committee in Chittagong has decided to enforce, what it calls, a 'people's curfew', in the port area — from yesterday morning.

Chittagong port has had one or the other problem dogging its footsteps, such as the inadequate handling capacity — compounded by labour troubles — leading to congestive failure at the wharves and outer anchorage or between them while containerising. But never before did it go as dysfunctional as it has of late.

The present crisis goes to highlight the risks involved in putting all the eggs in one basket — our critical, rather precarious, dependence on Chittagong as virtually the sole maritime port of the country. We ought to have hedged our bets.

This is not to belittle Chittagong port in any way; in fact, we want to see it fully developed into a modern, thriving entrepôt. At the same time let there be a deep sea port with the Mongla port extended, equipped and modernised at par with the Chittagong port.

Constitution and Institution

A 25-year-old nation cannot afford to spend its 20 years just in arguing about whether the elections are fair or not.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

pat in that election) clearly shows how a constitutional continuity syndrome could help arise public hatred and anguish. All appeared constitutional but triggered more heats than cool, more questions than answers. Suppose there is no stiff resistance to the holding of the Sixth Parliament and to that effect also, there is no need to argue for a neutral caretaker government. It would then follow that "constitutionally" the elected forces in 15th February 1996 should rule the country for another five-year term. Is not it? Whereas people inside and outside the country came to

know it very well that barely one-tenth of the people cast their votes on that particular election. Even if there was no call for a "Cono Curlew" by the opposition, the percentage of votes cast, perhaps, would never exceed 15 to 20 per cent given the pervasive non-participation of opposition political parties and the existence of a one-party game. The

count. This is not the fault of the constitution per se but a serious fault of our political leaders who are accustomed to take everything on 'ad hoc' basis and thus make no attempt to streamline constitutional hazards. To us, the current political stalemate does seem to reflect a constitutional crisis but undeniably it is a crisis of the constitution also. The crisis that our constitution befalls is the product of the lack of far-sightedness among our politicians. That lack of far-sightedness to some extent, allegedly reduced the power of the President to almost zero. A gentleman threw to me the following question: suppose, in such a country, all the parliament members of a particular parliament die in a plane crash, who would then rule the country?

The above episodes have been cited to argue that our leaders should spend more time in finding out ways of minimising the risks arising out of constitutional crisis. We wish that once the current crisis is over, sincere efforts would be made to make arrangements that would help uphold the constitution in its true spirit as well as in words and bring forth necessary ratification of suit future needs of the country. Bear in mind that many more resignations from the parliament, many more harals and many more constitutional arguments might await all of us in the near future. After all, a 25-

year-old nation cannot afford to spend its 20 years just in arguing about whether the elections are fair or not. Nowhere in this world, perhaps, the fairness and neutrality of a general election are put into such severe questions as it is in our country. The national leaders of those "lucky" countries are reported to be busy in moulding economic policies to build up their economies. Their politics hover around money scandals, protection of industries, free trade, employment, poverty etc. At the age of 25, the nation is crying for what a 5-year-old nation would cry: a free and fair election. Should not the government of a 25-year old country feel sorry and poor for this state of affairs?

While the president was drawing applause for his attempt to rescue all of us from the current political malaise, his abrupt decision to draw a curtain to the show apparently frustrated the teeming millions. It is argued that he should have explored other avenues and sources, taken a few days more and declare the results of the negotiation in a more transparent fashion. Allegedly, there is sufficient scope to believe that the President was driven more by a particular government's interest than by the interest of the state. After all, a president heads a state, not a government, and the interests of the two might not converge all the time. At the moment, the constitution hardly allows such distinction to be made. This is a back-lash in building democratic institutions.

President's Initiative and Summoning of the Parliament

by MA Mutaleb

WE must look at the UK and India for practices and conventions of parliamentary democracy. UK is the oldest country practising parliamentary system with success. India has been practising parliamentary system since its independence. The parliamentary system of government never works well without a titular Head of State whether he/she be a King/Queen as in the UK or a President as in India and Bangladesh.

On 28 March 1957 Pandit Nehru declared in the Lok Sabha: "We chose this system of parliamentary democracy deliberately; we chose it not only because to some extent we had always thought of those lines previously... We chose it — let's give credit where credit is due because we approved of its functioning in other countries, more especially in the United Kingdom. In the parliamentary system, the Head of a State has some routine works — he summons, prorogues and dissolves parliament, gives assent to bills, appoints Prime Minister, receives ambassadors, grants pardons, appoints all higher executives, holds supreme command over the defence services, reads speech in the parliament, appoints judges of the higher court etc. But these works are formalities. The Cabinet rules the

country under the leadership of the Prime Minister, but the Head of the State has the right to be consulted, the right to warn and the right to encourage. He very often acts as a mediator and uses his prestige to settle political conflicts. These are well-established conventions of parliamentary system of government.

Conventions have their binding force like laws. In 1913 and 1914 George V made efforts to secure agreements on the Home Rule Bill. The leaders of political parties failed to reach an agreement, but George V succeeded to bring them together. In his address at Buckingham Palace Conference on 21 July 1914 George V said, "My intervention at this moment may be regarded as a new departure, but the exceptional circumstances under which you are brought together justify my action." In 1916, King's private secretary tried to settle the dispute between Asquith and Lloyd George as directed by the King which led to the resignation of Asquith. George V played a very important role in 1921 over Irish Home Rule problem. In 1972, Queen Victoria wrote to Lord Russell, without Prime Minister. Gladstone's knowledge, not to move for papers on Alabama question so that the government should not be embar-

assed. Queen Victoria's mediation was once very helpful in resolving differences between the two houses of Parliament. Atlee says, "A King is a kind of referee." The Financial Times reported that Queen Elizabeth II intervened after Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's outright opposition to sanctions against South Africa. The Queen's mediation had a cooling effect on the extreme attitude of the Prime Minister.

India faithfully follows the conventions of the parliamentary system of the UK as far as they are applicable. Jagjiban Ram, a Union Minister since independence, till August 1979, said: "The president of India exercises his moderating influence and inspires or moulds policies and actions so silently or unobtrusively that many are prone to think that unlike other Heads of State he neither reigns nor rules." (Ajatashastra, edited by Valmiki Chowdhury). President V V Giri narrating his experience to the reporter of the Press Trust of India said: "Taking an overall view of my tenure, though I cannot say that I am satisfied with the results achieved it is for the government to implement policies and programmes. I have in my humble way put forward from

time to time concrete proposals designed to find solution to some urgent problems facing the country (Indian Express, New Delhi, August 19, 1974). The Philosopher President of India Dr. Radhakrishnan was a wise Head of State who advised, warned and encouraged when occasion demanded. In an exclusive interview with Promila Kalhan Venkataraman, who was then Vice-President of India and a Congress(I) nominee for Presidency, he expressed the view: "The President of India was not meant to be a second seat of power by the Founding Fathers of the Constitution of India. He can guide, advise and warn the government and should the Constitution seem to be leaking down, he can take necessary action to protect it. Otherwise his role is limited." When asked, "Suppose the Prime Minister does not listen to the advice of the President, what can the President do about it?" "Nothing," he replied. The interviewer intervened and said, "I suppose much depends on the personality of the President. His answer was, 'That is for you to say' (The Hindustan Times, July 5, 1987). The President in parliamentary system, like the King of Britain is not a

mere figurehead but actually vested with a pervasive and persuasive role by conventions. His office is of great dignity and he exercises great influence over policies and administration of the government. He is above party politics, according to conventions of parliamentary system.

In Bangladesh, the presence of the President was not felt during the long period of political crisis. At last, he appeared on the scene, but his initiatives according to his statement, had failed. Report from different sources show that the 15 February elections was a shame and a farce. The President has summoned the parliament on 19 March without resolving the political crisis. The President's action is a hurried one. He could seek opinion of the Supreme Court under Article 106 of the Constitution describing the whole backdrop including the real picture of the 15 February elections. Constitutional law-

yers are aware of the constitutional conventions. The present writer is happy that his colleague, Barrister Amrul Islam, of late agreed with him on this point. Supreme Court, the final interpreter of the Constitution, should have given a chance to give its advisory opinion. Consensus of conflicting political parties is not necessary at all for reference to the Supreme Court by the President.

Political crisis can never be resolved by force but wisdom. Summoning of the Parliament by the President is an obvious expression of political immaturity. It has dragged the President in an ugly political controversy. The President's decision, to use the language of studied moderation, unjustified to the point of constitutional impropriety.

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OPINION

If, I May Say So?

Shama K Moinuddin

I sit with a pen in my hand looking out of the window, wondering what to write about the present wait, watch and waste of the country's standstill. How long will we, the mothers, wives, sisters and onlookers look at the closed doors of the people's educational institutions, business houses, shops and offices. Wonder is this what we fought for, gave our chastity honour blood to achieve an independent country called Bangladesh. Lots of words, songs and stanzas have been written on the issues of the sacrifices made by our sons, brothers, husbands and even sisters. To build a happy home on a free independent soil, still soiled by the blood, who loved their people, the nation and the land. Is it to see this present acute socio-economic ruin — ruin of our hard-earned stable business industries to fall short and be heaped by other neighbours. We appeal to the political arena to stop this deadlock and save us from total loss of both financial and productive mass loss.

We shudder to think what the daily earners are facing? The fruit sellers, the flowers and other traders (both small and large). Please mesdames, if you love us — the people, the nation and the children — then come to a solution and save the wall, watch and waste problem soon before it's too late. What shall we answer to the growing future? Why are our schools closed? Why are not the cars moving? ... Why the rickshaws don't want to come our way? These are the points to ponder. Please do. All this restricts the positive impact if any of a government to be or to come and leaves out the majority of the populace. It is for this reason that politics has come to be the most widely and passionately discussed topic of our country. It effects practically all rural and urban classes. The latest is that even the lowest employee in the public sector needs to understand connections to protect his or her rights in political fields to gain so the result of an election involves repercussions for a large number of people in the city if elections are free and fair with the elite in authority, the people are the most important power in the country.

This should not be deprived of their economic rights, they have a social rights to live soundly, but has a class, in work, bring in the income in bringing up their families in a just and equitable manner at least. The leadership has

lacked insight capacity with or just hasn't had sufficient time to introduce a honest system which governs all regardless of people with political learning and associations, but it has distributed the existing one in being hit below the belt. Please let us live a normal life. Let the future generation move with peace, hope and security. Let there be more peace in their lives and even this is not available to all. The result is a fluid state, uncertainty, lawlessness, escalation in crime, run away inflation, economic sluggishness, increased devastation of administration, values, lifestyle. In short increased deprivation for the teeming millions. It is a bleak scenario, getting bleaker day by day because the problem has not been comprehended by the people, who take this in the government helm of matters and serious affairs of the state.

The lot can be stemmed up if they realise that the government must reach all the citizens, if it claims to be working for the country. If they do not, then a rapid frightening fragmentation of the society and a future deterioration of condition would soon be the only order of the day. Let us all in one voice appeal to the two honourable mesdames, the leader of the ruling party and prime minister and the chief of the Awami League and the leader of the opposition to think for a moment of the present situation — the complete stop of education, trade business both local and international. Think of the lakhs of people who are employed in the industrial areas like garments, jute, textiles and at other concerns. Don't deprive, these workers, who may be the only bread winner, who has to face the families with smiles, saying, I am there to gang up to bring it even if I may be a loser. To revive what they are fond of returning to a democracy, some of them opt for living as parasites of any autocratic regime, but has a class, they generally stay away from such fortune hunting. It teaches a new law of the apathy of the people in power. This is also because of the distance between academically, far and part dispensations, so short and distance between them, so narrow in practice.

This shows the root cause remains unidentified. Let above attend the segment in power who feels it is expanding its power but in reality it is shrinking. The writer is former Editor of Keya and a free lance journalist

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Flowers instead of arms

Sir, The total crisis of our country would begin to be solved from its deepest roots when some of those who are using and relying on arms realise that there is no future for the zealous and tolerant people of Bangladesh by the deadly means of arms.

If only a few partisans on both sides start to put their psychological and physical weapons aside and exchange, instead, flowers with their bitter opponents, the whole country would change. Those processions in the roads of Dhaka and all over the country, would be a signal of the real radical transformation of the society so much needed. We can't fight against one another all the time — we should begin with great courage and honesty to recognise one another to accept one another as legitimate parts of the country. We should forgive one another and work together with tough control over one another. Both the opposition and the government parties have done a lot for the country and its people. Nobody should try to wipe out the other side. Both sides belong to the history and to the present state of our country. Let us only shun one thing: the intent to destroy one another, to kill one another. Let us become small Haji Mohsins, small Gandhis because we believe in the highest value of active non-violence.

It is now only the people who decide about the fate of the nation. Truth is, coming forward more and more. People of all walks of society are coming forward with values we are so much missing among our rulers, among the party hardeners, not to speak of the masters, the corrupt officials, the rascals.

The fate of the nation is still at stake. In a few hours or in one or two days everything can be hopeful again, or totally disastrous for a long time.

Do not humiliate one side too much. Be ready for a compromise without lie. Sit in the parliament — but tell the truth to all and leave the parliament again. Then the way is free for the President to use all his power for the benefit of the people.

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We have suffered enough

Sir, We were extremely delighted and thought that at long last we would find peace and our country would pull back from the brink of disaster, when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia declared that a caretaker government would be formed and the next general election held in next May, as demanded by the opposition political parties. But no, the leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina downright rejected it and made it clear that unless the Prime Minister resigns and the sixth parliamentary election is cancelled the "ashahajog andolon" go on until the government falls. We are appalled and stunned by this declaration. If the Opposition political leaders cared for their country and its people they would have been happy as their main demands are agreed upon and let it go the opposition.

Sheikh Hasina is constantly saying that these are people's demands. I would like to know who are these people, she is referring to? Did she ever asked for opinion outside her party? People want relief from the unbearable situation and if it could be done passing the bill of a caretaker government in the JS of sixth parliamentary election held on February 15, they have no objection to it. They only want it to be done as soon as possible and thus spared from further agony.

We know that when the

body of a living thing is deprived of nourishment, which sustains it for a considerable time, it starts dying and a time comes when every effort fails to revive it. I am afraid if that is happening to our country! Our economy, education, health and many other sectors are badly affected and if the current situation does not change within a short time, we will only face ruin.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Civilised law-abiding politicians needed

Sir, For the last two years, in the name of establishing the neutral caretaker government and in the name of resisting the same, our politicians in their overall activities have failed to prove that they are law-abiding citizens. They talked, behaved and acted not in accordance with the norms of a civilised society.

Are these politicians able to bring about a fruitful solution to a trifling problem through a civilised manner like the ongoing dialogue? How, then, these politicians, whether in the power or in the opposition will be able to establish a lawful society for the people to live in peace?

The neutral caretaker government is meant for only to conduct elections fairly and that was what Justice Shahabuddin's government did. But then what? A neutral caretaker government does not ensure that after the election is over, our politicians will not act and behave unlawfully and irresponsibly. After being elected democratically, will they stop acting again undemocratically? Sometimes it seems to me that our politicians are a special breed of persons created for a country named Bangladesh!

Any way now is the time that the politicians must give serious thoughts on defining their own conducts and course of activities. The dialogue which is the most civilised way to resolve any dispute, has started. Politicians must see their faces in the mirror and must act sensibly and responsibly like civilised citizens so that the dialogue which has

aroused great hope among the people, does not fail to yield positive result. A lawful, civilised society can only be established and governed by law-abiding civilised politicians. Is there any alternative? I say no. If yes, then it is anarchy.

M R R Khan
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No more power-politics, please

Sir, It is bitter but true that one of the main causes of continuing political crisis in our country is the tug of war between Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina for power. While the former likes to retain power for a long time to come, the latter wants to come to power immediately.

With a view to overcoming our ever-deteriorating political turmoil we strongly feel any one of our two great lady political leaders may kindly take rest for sometime, keeping herself totally aloof from politics until the situation in the country returns to normal.

During the so-called general elections held under the compulsion of ruling BNP and boycotted and resisted by AL-JP on February 15, 1996, the people could not cast their votes due to obvious reasons known to all. Both the BNP and AL-JP are equally responsible for the unfortunate disaster.

Amidst chaos and confusion and deteriorating law and order situation Begum Khaleda Zia has been elected the leader of the House of the 6th Parliament.

We would suggest for the sake of peace and political amity in the country that Begum Khaleda Zia may kindly hand over power to any of her senior colleagues in BNP temporarily, pending amendment to Constitution and holding of a free and fair general election under a neutral caretaker government.

We hope that both Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina would prove their foresightedness, wisdom and love for the people and thus save the country from the great crisis.

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