## The Baily Star Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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## Supply Exemptions

Prices of consumer items are soaring as never before. This is ascribed to supply dislocations caused not so much by production shortfalls as by transportation difficulties. In some cases, however, manipulation by the traders is pushing up the price. Admittedly, this is an abnormal market situation, far worse than anything the consumers have experienced before. The country's political instability has reached almost a breaking point, so has people's patience. When the daily necessities are hard to come by and, if available, are extremely dear, the frustration and helplessness are enough to drive one mad.

The opposition parties appear to have acknowledged the fact and are making more and more relaxations to their non-cooperation movement. Vehicles carrying food items - rice, fish, meat, egg, milk, fruits, vegetables and some other perishable goods have been exempted from the purview of the programme. This scaling down of the shutdown in defence to the people's suffering will no doubt go down well as far as it goes. We hope this will ease off the pressure on the supply situation somewhat and help bring the price of essentials down. The fact that traders most of the time fail to immediately respond to a better supply situation by lowering the price is to be borne in mind so that necessary follow-up measures are taken to ensure this.

The exemption move, however, can fizzle out or lead to tragic incidents if the political parties concerned fail to clearly communicate the message and the purpose behind the move to their cadres down the ranks.

The vehicles having food items to transport have been instructed to prominently display on banners what they are carrying. There have been instances where party activists took it upon themselves to arbitrarily interpret exemptions and thus failed to oblige their leaders. Let no such thing happen this time around. People do need some relief from the price crunch.

#### Where it is Coming to

The late night bomb-throwing into the houses of three DU teachers followed closely on the heels of threats to life abusively issued to over telephone a number of intellectuals in the city. The pattern is unmistakable. In the earlier incident, victims were advised to keep lock-jawed as far as any further articulation of their beliefs or opinions went on pain of inviting dangers to their lives. As for the armed attack on the teachers' quarters, a 24-hour ultimatum was given to them to quit the campus or face dire consequences.

The whole idea seems to be to administer . shocks upon selected detractors with the object of silencing political dissent in general or short of that containing it. But the perpetrators make no secret of their intention even to finish them off. This is a crude expression of an untolerant rage smacking of a defeatist or beleaguered mentality. So it is heinous all the way, as if taking a leaf out of the book written by alien occupants of the country, long since banished from the scene.

If the tendency to put people on the hit list and send squads after opponents to satisfy political vendetta does not stop here and now, there will be no end to murderous arrangement in a politically volatile situation like ours. Today it is the university teachers or a set of writers but tomorrow it can be businessmen or other professional people falling victims to political musclemanry, especially under the charged circumstances we are in.

Politics has penetrated so much into our lives that in its erratic form it has become a veritable threat to the security of individuals. It can be rolled back only if the indulgence and inducement, being given directly or indirectly to party activists are withdrawn forthwith.

There is nothing wrong with politics as such, nor even a modicum of politicisation or animated rivalry. What, however, will prove suicidal for democracy is throwing its basic norms to the four winds without any compunction whatsoever.

# The Cynic and the Optimist: Who is Right?

Begum Zia's decision to deploy the armed forces to suppress the Opposition's noncooperation movement makes sense only if she is trying to hold on to power for as long as possible.

HE joke going around in Dhaka these days is that there is indeed a light at the end of the tunnel; but it is the headlight of an oncoming train. All joking apart, the picture is certainly a gloomy one. The government has yielded on the question of a neutral caretaker government. But a new complication has been added by the one party election of February 15. which has been rejected not only by the opposition political parties but even by nonpolitical sections of the society such as the business

community, the NGO

community, the doctors, engi-

neers, teachers, artists, authors and other professionals. In fact, the demand for the cancellation of this rather disgraceful event is so widespread that even the supporters of BNP find it hard to ignore. Thus we have a new problem on our hands - a rejected election and an unwanted parliament. The deadlock continues, not because of disagree ment on the opposition's proposal for a neutral caretaker government but on account of a new problem created by Begum Zia due to her insistence on holding an election boycotted by all the opposition

parties. In talking to the political pundits I find them divided into two camps — the cynics and the optimists. The optimists are those who expected that since Begum Zia held the one party election against her will only in order to uphold the constitution, she will surely dissolve the parliament and resign once the caretaker bill is passed. Therefore, these optimists would want the opposition and everybody else to have patience and wait till Begum Zia fulfills her commitments. They are still waiting to see it happen.

The cynics, on the other hand, never believed that either Begum Zia or her hardline ministers had any plans to quit so soon after ensconcing themselves snugly in their ministerial seats of power. As one can see right now, there are so many ways to delay any action and just hang on to power. The cynics seem to be winning.

The ministers are talking about not resigning any time soon if the Opposition does not come to terms with them. How can the opposition come to terms with them? Obviously, by accepting the so-called parliament's legitimacy. So, here we are, a new stumbling block has arisen to a solution, a new Chinese wall. Since the opposition has said that it will not accept the legitimacy of the 15 February election and the parliament that was formed on its basis, the BNP government can merrily continue in office in-





laid so cunningly by the BNP strategists. Am I being too partisan and harsh on the BNP? Well, let us look at some of the latest steps taken by the BNP and try to see if these are unfair conclu-

In response to the almost universal demand from the nation, the President indicated that he would try to find a negotiated settlement if both sides requested him to do so. The opposition requested him publicly and repeatedly to arrange negotiations under his

good offices. After much delay and hesi tation, Begum Zia also agreed to give the green signal to the President and accordingly he initiated the process of consultation. The whole nation was eagerly waiting for a break through from the Presidential

initiative. Though a constitutional head of state, there was a natural expectation that in a moment of grave national crisis. the President had enough residual power to step in to save the Republic. All the par ties presented their case to the President and it was expected that on the basis of the first round of consultations he would arrange, under his auspices, actual dialogue between the BNP and the Opposition.

Unfortunately, all of a sud den, the President issued statement terminating the initiative. The partisan nature of the statement was obvious to any impartial observer. Why did he abruptly end the effort? Did he do so on his own or on advice from the cabinet? The people believe that the BNP did not want the dialogue to continue as they wanted to immediately convene the first session of the so called parliament and form the govern-

The President's initiative would have delayed the process of legitimization of the illegal parliament and the formation of the cabinet. Quite clearly. BNP's priority was to grab power quickly. In their eagerness to grab power peaceful and negotiated set tlement was cast aside rather unceremoniously.

. The next step by the BNP was to intensify the activities of its armed cadres in an effort to neutralize and defeat the Opposition's non-cooperation

movement. While this has not made any dent in the non-co-

certainly added to the frequency of armed clashes and the number of casualties. When this did not change the situation on the ground. Begum Zia ordered the armed forces to come out on the street. One has seen the futility of these strong arm tactics at the Chittagong Port. Despite the deployment of Navy and the Army units, the port remains virtually closed. But then, one may ask, why has the government deployed the armed forces? The problem faced by the nation is a political problem, not one of law and order. The armed forces can, of course, be called upon to assist the civil authorities if the country faces a law and order problem. But the armed forces cannot resolve the government's political, problem. By deploying the armed forces to suppress dissent and opposition. Begum Zia is risking the good name of our valiant armed forces. She is using our brave soldiers in her partisan manoeuvre to hang on to power on the basis of an election which has been rejected by both local and foreign observers. In fact, by abstaining from the opening of the illegal parliament, the international community has sent a loud signal which no one can miss.

However, Begum Zia's de cision to deploy the armed forces to suppress the Opposition's non-cooperation movement makes sense only if she is trying, contrary to the impression given earlier, to, hold on to power for as long as possible. Thus we see the cynics winning. Those who put their faith in BNP's vague assurances that the so-called parliament will meet "only for one day to pass the caretaker bill" must have by now real ized their mistake. Their naive optimism ignored BNP track record of broken promises. Careful analysis shows that Begum Zia chose the path that she did not for a quick and peaceful solution but for tightening her grip on power. Until she actually resigns and dissolve the so called parliament and a neutral caretaker government is installed by the President, one must take the BNP's words with a large lump of salt. Breaking solemn promises seems to have become a habit with them.

#### OPINION

## Is Anyone Listening?

Nazim Farhan Chowdhury

Democracy is no doubt, a very precious object. It guarantees us certain basic or as the Americans would put it "inalienable" rights. Rights to free speech, of idea, of choice and that of being masters of our own destiny. Democracy is a privilege enjoyed by man since that famous bite into the Apple in the Garden of Eden.

But like anything so dear it comes with a hefty price tag. To enjoy it one needs to be able to afford it. And more than anything we need to understand and appreciate the value of democracy. So, what is the price of democracy, and are we ready and willing to pay it? Is it the spiralling food and medicine prices? Is it few lives lost at Mohakhali crossing? Is it the inconvenience of having cars absent from the roads? What is it?

A lot of Bangladeshis will agree with me, that the crux of

our problem is that there is a distinct lack of anyone in command. There is a void in a nation who has produced great leaders like Bhashani, or Mujib. An absence of a person to lead our great country. A bankruptcy in the banks of our political leadership. Our politicians have no real contact with the mass. They do not know our wants, desires and most of all our concepts of democracy. Even the more senior, the more promising lights are in a doldrums. Dr Kamal Hossain, Mr Menon, Mr Sengupta and the like are unfortunately struggling to just stay afloat. The saviour in the earlier times were the Armed Forces but they are now very rightly not getting seriously involved. To them it is a 'it'syour-problem-you-solve-it'

syndrome. The predicament facing us who, then? So who is the shepherd to take us to the greener pastures that we dream of? Well the so-called intellectuals seem to have more hot air than the Fuji blimp. Maybe the men who have till now lead the country's development revolution - Professor Yunus and Dr Abed? But are they listening? That for you

is a little food for thought.

I have the answer! But before I proceed to share my thoughts with you, please let me paint a you a little picture. There is no transport in the streets, and therefore, there is no food to sell. So even if the kutcha bazaar does not fall under the preview of the noncooperation movement, it means Rahim Bhai, the vegetable dealer's sale for this period is zero. Now in normal times he just made his ends meet. Today he has no savings but seven children. Then there is Karimuddin the day-labourer at a building site. No shops are to open my friend, that means you do not get the wood to do the carpentry work to feed the family. Ayesha's mother is grievously sick. Sorry she may not make it. You see the pharmadeutical factories have been closed for the last month and the port is dead. This means no medicine. And what about Fazlu Miah? So what if diesel prices have skyrocketed and you cannot afford to irrigate

your fields? At least even if the

crops fail you will go to bed

satisfied that you have stood firm for the good of the nation. And when democracy will be restored, 330 Members of Parliament can buy tax-free Nissan Patrols to visit constituencies that do not even have roads!

See without the economy working there will no longer be any food, clothes or medicine in the stores. Why Gulshan Market may even run out of Quality Street Chocolates. Shudders! Sheikh Antonniate cannot feed us with cakes very much longer. There is bound to be more serious problem in Bangladesh than we are really thinking of. Hungry mobs are dangerous. Food riots will not leave anyone in the Chair for long. Guillotines will be out at a flash.

Whatever we tend to believe, economics is or should be the guiding principle of the nation right now and not democracy. However we burn cars to show protest, We close our ports and factories to say that it is in the long run beneficial to the country. We kill and maim our labour force with ideal bickering. We think millions of dollars worth of goods lying ready for shipment is just a drop in the bucket. How sad that the powers that be in Bangladesh do not know the simple principles of economics.

So what is my answer to our leadership crisis? Like most in the country, though I tend to believe I know, the sad truth is that I have no clue of what is the right way to govern. But I. like the rest of my countrymen and women have found out, much to our dismay the wrong way of governing. The nation as a whole is not rich enough to afford the luxury of the democracy if it means the economy is to lie in a shambles. It is time now not only to see with our eyes but also with our soul. It is time that we say "ENOUGH!!" This is the time for the nation to go bravely into the next millenntum and not be left behind while other nations prosper. This is the time when whoever is brave and patriot enough to forsake ones own ambitions and greed for power to go forward to the people and to lead. And that person will be rewarded with a grateful nation following him to the valleys of prosperity and democracy that we deserve. But is there anyone out there listening?

## Time for Hard Reckoning Approaches Fast

HE opposition demands. as it rest now comprise ▲ a) cancellation of the 15 February election, b) disbandment of the 6th parliament c) resignation of the Prime Minister, d) formation of a neutral, non-partisan, caretaker government to conduct elections and el holding of election in May next.

The ruling party, in its turn, has agreed to all the last three demands, namely that the Prime Minister will resign. elections will be conducted by neutral, non-partisan, caretaker government and that the election will be held in May

What the government could

not accept was to cancel the 15 February election and to disband the 6th parliament. The government's refusal to explore any action in these directions is not of its own volition but due to its inability to do so, as it is not sanctioned by law and convention. Since our infant democracy has not yet been able to develop democratic traditions like in mature democratic countries, the question of acting under unestablished conventions does not at all arise. That leaves the existing laws and their primary source, the constitutions. Nothing contained in the existing legislation and in the constitution, as amended from time to time. permits the government either to cancel the election or abolish the parliament. A mere statement by the opposition or

by M M Rezaul Karim

tically curtailed in our constitution following transformation of the Presidential to the Parliamentary form of govern ment. Even the Head of State of our neighbouring countries like India and Pakistan, enjoy more powers than our Presi-On the question of making a

reference to the Supreme Court by the President, Article 106 of Bangladesh constitution is explicit in allowing making of a reference on a point "of law" and not "of fact", unlike coverage of both points existing in the Indian constitution under Article 143. The issue to be referred to the Supreme Court, as demanded also by the opposition, is not on a point of law, specially when no law has been enacted on this subject in our country, but in the legal jargon on a point of fact and in common parlance and practice on political grounds. Even the Supreme Court, in its consideration of a case, is governed by a code almost common to all democracies and is likely to be reluctant to deviate from the charted path.

However, in matters of national crisis, one may argue and justifiably so, and in the absence of an appropriate provision in the constitution to deal with an unforeseen situation, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, being the prime interpreter, guardian and arbiter of the constitution. may consider exercising its

one should ask oneself a soulsearching question. Now that -the election is to be held in months time in May next as demanded by the opposition. that too under a neutral, nonpartisan caretaker government as demanded by the opposition, and that the Prime Minister is to resign well before the election also as demanded by the opposition, is there any plausible reason to justify continuing the non-cooperation or even a semi-violent civil disobedience movement with compounded consequential misery, distress and loss to the general mass of people and to the nation as a whole? Are we not demanding too heavy a price for too little a benefit, that too for a subjective value judgement, which brings no material gains to the people and provides little comfort to their sufferings?

What the 12 crore people really care at present is not whether the 15th February election and the 6th parliament are unjust or event unlawful, as long as they are assured that the Prime Minister is going to resign within a few weeks and that the election to form a parliament of everybody's choice and participation under a neutral, non-partisan, caretaker government is going to be held in a couple of months time. What they seriously mind is the imprudent impatience of so few causing unprecedented misery to so many and prolonging it for so long. Even if it is argued, as it

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issuing of an order by the government to this effect will not be valid in the eyes of the law. unless authority to make such declarations is explicitly spelled out as per specific le

gal or constitutional provisions The one and only body competent to pronounce judgement or pass a judicial opinion on the question of legality or otherwise of the two issues is the Supreme Court The opposition is fully aware of it, but has refrained from challenging the legality of the election and of the parliament in the court of law. The BNP feels that such a challenge in the Supreme Court is being avoided by the opposition for fear of losing the motion and consequently dealing a serious. if not fatal, blow to its ongoing

movement. Recently, an interesting debate is being raged about a reference that may be made by the President to the Supreme Court. Despite some ambiguity about the text of the proposed reference, one may surmise that it relates to the authority of the President to form a neutral, non-partisan, caretaker government to supervise parliamentary elections. The President after having consulted with the principal political parties, three former Chief Justices, eminent jurists, heads of different organisations and prominent citizens expressed his inability to issue an ordinance to form an interim, caretaker government.

In an address to the inaugural session of the 6th parliament, the President outlined the government's legislative and other proposals, which included a suitable legislation enabling formation of the proposed caretaker government.

We all are well aware that the authority and functions of the president have been dras-

discretion to accept a case of this nature for consideration on the basis of the doctrine of necessity and of such other grounds.

However, the Supreme Court is most unlikely to entertain such a hypothetical case on grounds of being "speculative" as was cited in similar cases around the world, also suggested in these columns recently, unless perhaps all the principal political parties categorically wish to make such a reference in supreme national interest. But all principal parties have not

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The BNP was agreeable to make a reference to the Supreme Court and even proposed to draft its text jointly with the opposition during the, backstage parley before the election, but the opposition broke off the negotiation abruptly only a few minutes before they were to meet on the 16th January last, without even suggesting an alternative time for another meeting. Now that the new parlia-

ment, which has not been declared illegal and void by any. court of law, is currently seized with the consideration of the caretaker government bill, the proposal of making a reference to the Supreme Court becomes both irrelevant and redundant. Again, the question of issuing a Presidential Ordinance does not arise at all, as the Parliament is in session now.

Under these circumstances.

has been done by the opposition, that the amendment to be passed by the present "illegal" parliament is invalid. then eliciting general public opinion through the ensuing referendum should impart the

missing validity to the formation of a caretaker government and allow holding of a multiparty election. Besides, the opposition should also be invited formally, preferably in writing, to give their opinion on the draft amendment. They should then, on their part, oblige by agreeing to it, if needed, even by stating that expression of their opinion would be without prejudice to their stand about non-recognition of the present parliament

Some indications have also been received most recently suggesting that the rigours of non-cooperation will be somewhat eased gradually, This is a welcome development and, if the action is taken, would merit appreciation.

The government must speedily complete the process of passing the constitutional amendment bill, promptly announce the date of election in May, dissolve the parliament immediately thereafter and hand over power to a newly constituted non-partisan caretaker government following resignation of the Prime Minister. The opposition will also have no qualmis or justification for making any movement other than the legitimate one to cajole voters to vote in their favour during the election.

If the opposition has waited for two long years, it can wait for two short months as well. for the sake of peace, democracy and development. Would it be asking for too much from nation's respected and patriotic leaders? Optimists still nurture their fond hopes and the leaders must not fail them.

## Dhaka Day by Day

## The Joys of Giving

In Dhaka we may not have Mother's Day or Father's Day but there are occasions enough to make the shopkeepers in New Elephant Road, New Market, Eastern Plaza and other shopping centres to stack their shops with goods like toys, clothes, after-shaves and perfumes.

Tarana, a young woman at Crescent Road, spends an enormous portion of her salary in buying stuffed teddy bears, speeding batteryrun toy cars, walkie-talkie dolls, chocolates, ice-cream, and pastel coloured frilled girls' dresses with can-cans. Every time she comes home loaded with goodies for her six nephews and nieces she is scolded by her mother: "You should save your salary for studying abroad. You have no father to fend for you. You should be careful." But does Tarana listen? Last time she went to Bangkok and Calcutta for seminars, she came back with beautiful gifts for one who is just a friend of the family. Tarana is generous almost to a fault and loves showering gifts as he goes her way — and it does not have to be on birthdays only.

Giving gifts on birthdays may be more of a Western custom but today it has certainly caught up with the Dhakites. Shahnaz, who has a nine-to-six job and whom I often visit at her workplace in Motifheel has this to say so often. This month I have a wedding, an anniversary, an aqiqa, and four birthdays. I don't know how I'm going to stretch my salary to get adequate gifts even if they are token ones." As a personal secretary in a leading firm Shahnaz earns only Tk 8,000 and has two children whom she is supporting as a single mother. One wonders how she can get through her social life of regular birthday parties, considering that she dolls up like a mannequin on a catwalk. "I often grow potted plants on my terrace and given them away in quaint pottery works," she confides.

Western ways have certainly caught with us if we go by Valentine Days cards at new Market. Recently a boy of fourteen ordered 10 large boxes of imported chocolates for the day, apart from 10 bright cards. He, in return, got invaded by massive parcels himself. We certainly have a streak of affluent society.

Another friend of mine from Wari was going round the bend looking for gifts. She had been out shopping for a week despite the recent trouble in town. "It was my son's girlfriend's birthday. She is constantly showering Humayun with presents and she never visits our house empty handed. I scoured the markets for a nice silk sari and a perfume to go with it. After all, she gave me a shawl for the Bangla New Year, so. I felt obliged to give something nice in return. I went everywhere from Bailey Road to Chandni Chawk," Rahnuma explains.

Whenever Nasreen comes to Dhaka from Madras or Karachi, her bags are packed with clothes, hand-bags, toys and what have you for her friends and family. Her friends naturally call her on the phone when she arrives, and she then has the fun of her life of distributing beautiful knicknacks from overseas among her close friends. "Sitting and working in Maghbazar I earn enough. Why shouldn't I share all this with my friends who make my life so pleasant - I have enough to spare. There are so many things that you can't get in Dhaka and it's no sin to get them from overseas if one can," Nasreen says.

Well-to-do Dhakites spread their largesse not only among their friends and family but to anybody who is unusually nice to them. Nargis. the other day, calls up from D.O.H.S and says to me. I have a beautiful blue pin striped shirt for the telephone operator in your office who has always been getting me the line to you for the past two years I know I've never met him but I think he deserves it."

. Similarly Rowshan buys trinkets like bead necklaces and aluminium bangles from shops near New Market to placate her buas at home, and this is not just during the two Eids. They too must have their joys and pleasures. she explains her generosity.

Receiving presents mean happiness to most but giving also entails a sense of satisfaction and completion. No wonder there are shops in the city that specialise in selling wrapping papers and gift cards.

#### Of angiography facilities

Sir, Please refer to BM Birla's advertisement of March 08, 1996 in The Daily Star.

Performing an angiogram is now a fairly common procedure in any heart centre or a general hospital having a cardiac unit. By pass is also common in these centres and is now considered as a "gall stone level surgery" — the success rate of all these being dependent on the team developed for the purpose. The same applies for ballooning. In neighbouring countries there are several centres big and small doing these successfully. Therefore Birla's claim in this sector is nothing outstanding.

Readers must know that a cath lab with digital subtraction angiography having biplane capability along with an eight channel EP unit has been installed at the Army Hospital last year. This is a very modern system where cardiac angiograms are being successfully performed.

Interestingly, in Bangladesh coronary angiograms and open heart surgery were done at ICVD long before Birla came to the scene. It started in late

seventies or early eighties. Unfortunately this centre could not eventually sustain/develop due to the myopic views of some of our doctors and the management. There are at least 3/4 cardiologists in the country who could easily rank with the level of the overseas doctors often quoted in this country. Given the opportunity they would probably have a better score. Regretfully they are being side lined by vested quarters. Due to some "square pegs in round holes" this branch of medicine therefore could not make a breakthrough in this country although there is still a big

Again Birla's "Swing Lab" needs to be defined. Extraction Atherectomy, Rotoblations are fairly new techniques and Birla's score here is unknown.

possibility.

Finally, the purpose of this letter is not to undermine Birla's capability but to let cardiac patients know the availability for alternative centres at home and abroad so that patients may have a choice instead of blindly following advertisements and news items.

HQ Chowdhury 20, Dootabash Road, Boridhara, Dhaka-1212.

The telephone is dead, why?

eration of my telephone (No. from 29 January, 1996?

now draw the kind attention of the highest authorities of the T&T Board to please look into the matter. Md Joynal Abedin Bhuiyan 289/1. East Goran, Medina Mosque Road.

Sir, May I draw the kind attention of the appropriate authority of the Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board for restoration and op-412180) which is lying dead

Complaints were made to the Supervisor and Supervisor Incharge, Bashaboo camp office. In addition to these complaints, I have made a lot of complaints in the camp office personally but to no effect. The SDO several times recorded the complaints and assured me over telephone to restore the telephone but to no effect. The Divisional Engineer, Maghbazar, Dhaka on many occasions recorded the complaints but to no effect. Assistant Divisional Engineer, Maghbazar, Dhaka also on many occasions recorded the complaints but to no effect. ' In view of the above, may

Dhaka-1212