The Baily Star

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Open, Hopefully Forever

Our country has been closed - closed for production, business, work, studies, seminars, cultural activities. In fact we have been closed for everything except politics. Now we declare ourselves open, and hopefully forever. We never want to be in another situation when our political differences become so intractable that the only way to solve them is contest in the streets. and that also by closing down the country. The way to ensure that would be to learn some lessons from the current experience. There are lessons for future ruling and opposition parties, and for the civic society. Serious questions have been raised about the role of government servants in situations like the ones we have just witnessed. All these are for our near future.

As for our immediate future, the challenge is to create a proper climate to hold a free and fair election for which the opposition parties have been struggling for the last three years, and for which the nation had to make such a huge sacrifice. Yes, we have our wished for non-party caretaker government. But we all know that while it is necessary for a good elections, it is far from sufficient. There is one fundamental difference between the situation in '91 and in '96 which is very important to remember. In the former case the party 'dethroned' was on the sideline. In the present instance it forms one of the main contenders for power in the coming election. Thus the rivalry between the contending parties is likely to be much sharper and of the do-or-die type, making the task of the non-party government so much more difficult.

It is to this difficulty that we would like to draw the attention of all concerned. It will be a huge blunder to think that getting the non-party government in place accomplishes our task. Far from it. It only begins the whole process. In holding a free and fair election cooperation of the political parties is of supreme importance. But we must be realistic. Their support will always have an angle. The only source of disinterested but genuine support will be the so-called civic society — a term that we take to include citizens in general, especially those organised in professional, business, labour, academic, social and cultural groups. These groups must give strength to the non-party government to enact election related laws concerning further autonomy for the EC, transparency of election expenses, code of conduct for political parties and their candidates, and the like. In this connection Chief Advisor may wish to look into some of the agreements worked during Sir Ninian's negotiations.

A Longing for Normalcy

O, how good it is to return to the din and bustle of Dhaka. To the Dhaka of traffic jams and frayed nerves. One felt so free on the first morning of people's victory that one took a long breath filling in the lungs with the noxious black fume that passes for air here. And one felt so happy. This is life. We are back to life. For two long years something was pressing down on our chest. And for last three weeks it seemed we could take it no more. And then came release from it all and success. An all round victory even Khaleda has called it so.

Over three weeks of asahajog and the long two years punctuated by hartals most people went through a duality of feeling both good and bad at the same time about the same thing after Neels Bohr's complementarity principle perhaps.

With victory shining bright on March 31 morning that duality was gone. Now is come the time for normalcy. How we now want our days to become ordinary - far from the tensions of time burdened by a sense of duty and taut with intimations of greatness.

It is very good - and democratic - to be ordinary. And it is to ensure that this ordinariness of the people and of the days sustains, special junctures arrive making special demands of the people and their days and lives. We were not found wanting on such occasions in 1971 and 1990. It is glorious that in 1996 also we could match and better crises of immeasurable difficulty. It will be great if we can so perform whenever needs warrant such.

But ordinary does not always mean normal. For one thing, just any other day can hide what is very deceptively normal. Extremes of anger and poverty, the two worst aberrations of human society, look both normal and ordinary in Bangladesh. As does the amnesia that has taken toll of the Liberation War and the glorious tributaries that joined to make it and the undying heroes of the rise of the Bengalee people, our ordinary days will become truly normal when we shall overcome these and thousand others of their like.

The Turin Summit Draws New Map of Europe

The EU members would do well to remember that immigrants in the long run are not a burden. They are assets if properly utilised. They add to the improvement of the quality of life of their own people.

S the 15-country EU has finished its meeting, mo-A st important since Maastricht, on March 29 and 30, one doesn't know if any of the leaders remembered TO Masaryk, the founder of Czechoslovakia. What Masaryk did between 1915 to 1918, the EU meeting in Turin was again engaged in drawing lines for the new map of Europe.

The Czech leader was a strong believer in democracy as the rule of the people, but he always emphasised no democratic government could function without obedience and discipline. A modern-day Masaryk would have added another word, the talisman of democratic culture, that is, accountability and transparency.

The EU leaders in Turin have agreed to lend a hand to beleaguered Britain in resolving its problem of mad cow The EU partners are certainly not unaware of the fact that Britain has always enjoyed itself to the continent during the war times. Her joining the EU happening as it did after a considerable time of hand wringings on both sides of the Channel, the continent of Europe notes the historic fact that it is the first time since Reformation that Britain has made a peacetime engagement to the continent. Lambarto Dini's categorical statement about alleviating the pangs of the 'mad cow' disease symbolises the fact that the Europe of the next millermium is heavily depending on Paul Valery's suggestion that the idea of Europe means 'Greece

plus Rome plus Christianity There is a great deal of support in the move towards engagement of the Community. British monarch, her majesty

Queen Elizabeth assured the Poles about the British readiness to lend its hand to Poland to the Union. If must have been a historic moment for the Poles, within and without. The Poland of yesterday, partitioned five times, and dissected many more, seems to be getting a modicum of justice. The souls of those murdered in Katyn and those killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt would get a beautified peace at the eventual admission of Poland to the EU and its integration in the mainstream European economic and political edifice.

Turky is also knocking at the door, she has been granted some customs facilities but full membership is miles away.

The other major problem that the leaders will have to tackle is the question of decision-making mechanism. Till now consensus is the rule which gives virtually a veto power to any member-state. To overcome this the process of qualified majority voting may be accepted but a number of countries, including Britain, think that such a decision will mean eventual surrender of national sovereignty. They consider that majority voting

Waliur Rahman

Gountries like Malta and Cyprus are being accorded new recognition. Maltese beaches and Cypriot wines are attrac-

Others are not sitting idle. Otto Von Hapsburg, the last in the lineage of living Austro-Hunparion Hapsburg family is making all efforts to get Hungary into the EU. A country which had considerable amount of market-oriented enterprise before the fall of the Communist Empire, is finding it very hard to convince the EU leadership. Otto Von Hapsburg clearly indicates his unhappiness with what he calls the capacity of the Brussels bureaucracy in rendering 'simple' problems into complex ones. Moslem

principle may be acceptable on all issues excepting such sensitive areas as foreign policy and defence policy.

While the EU will have to grapple with such questions as expansion, voting pattern greater transparency in deci sion-making mechanism, the leaders will have to look over their sholders with regard to the security aspect as well. Article V of the NATO Charter requires the member states to come to the rescue of any state which is a victim of armed aggression. Security aspect is gaining importance particularly in view of the prospect of admission of former Warsaw Pact countries into the EU The concern of the Russian government in this connection

is significant. Europe was left mutilated

and prostrate after World War II. The continent sustained two severe body flows: it lost its colonies and it lost Eastern Europe. The effort to restore Europe cannon, therefore, be seen in isolation from political and administrative aspects apart from the economic aspect. Who doesn't remember that between 1870 and 1914 34 million Europeans emigrated to other countries? Before 1939 it was known that a question of the people of Europe lived outside Europe. Today citizens of former colonies. which mostly are overpopulated, are making a beeline towards Europe for economic security. Bangladesh for example has over a quarter million of its citizens all over Europe. largest concentration being in Britain, and the second biggest settlement being in Italy.

These cuizens from former European colonies are actively engaged in contributing to the production of goods and services in these countries. But occasional spurts supremacist attacks on them are not too infrequent The rise of rightist political parties in some countries is not making things easy. The next agenda of the IGC would include the question of proper dispensation to these immigrants and work force from former colonies. The EU members would do well to remember that immigrants in the long run are not a burden. They are assets if properly utilised. They add to the Improvement of the quality of life of their own people. If you need an example, look at

a masque parade it is the group of chameleons who will eventually gain from the rhetorical debate. They will rule in the name of religion, in the name of identity. With their pro-'friends-not-masters' attitude, they will pave the way for foreign goods to destroy

duction.

Shabaash Bangladesh!

Lt. Col. Mohammed A. Latif (Retd)

I C HABAASH Bangladesh! The world looks at you with awe. That was the first line of a famous poem written by an equally famous poet - Shukanto Bhattacharya. Five decades later since Shukanto wrote that line, the world still looks at Bangladesh with equal awe and amazement. It is the extraordinary level of sufferings this nation can endure that continues to amaze the rest of the world.

For the people of Bangladesh, the last two months were excruciatingly painful yet at the same time remarkably glorious. The people suffered extreme hardship. The business community were at the brink of bankruptcy. The industries were shut down. The educational institutions were locked-up. The whole nation seemed to be frozen into inaction. Perhaps the word 'inaction' is not quite appropriate. The people were very actively engaged in the action of regaining their basic civic rights. The right to vote freely. The right to choose public officials without any fear. To establish these basic rights, the people fought with heroism, courage and determination that will continue to inspire the voiceless, voteless, downtrodden people all over

the world. The political stalemate that paralysed the entire nation resulted from the monumental blunder of some of our political leaders who gave more importance of clinging to power over the national priorities. The political stalemate escalated into a full blown constitutional crisis that plunged the nation into a turmoil. Yet the nation survived this crisis. Only a strong nation can withstand such an upheaval. The social fabric of this ancient nation is astonishingly resilient. That's why we survived this crisis.

Bangladesh may be a small country without much economic or strategic clout at the international arena. But today Bangladesh emerged as a great democratic nation with moral power. Only a heroic people of a great nation would readily sacrifice so much for the ideal of democracy. The country which was once derisively called as Henry Kissinger's bottomless basket is now South Asia's new emerging economic tiger. The country which was once a case-study of brutal triage theory by some heartless western economists. is now a powerhouse in the garment industry. Once perennially dependent on foreign food supply Bangladesh is now self-sufficient in food pro-

The recent crisis was a selfpurifying process for the na-

traordinary self-reliance to find the solution of this crisis on its own. The foreign mediators came to impose various versions of different alien formulae. But ultimately the nation found its own solution, however difficult and painful it may have been. The crisis tested the very limits of our democratic system. No doubt. any country would certainly plunge into the abyss of complete anarchy if it would face the same crisis what Bangladesh faced during the last two months. Still Bangladesh emerged in tact, her national spirit as vibrant as

Bangladesh today is a proud

nation. The name of

Bangladesh is now associated with the revolutionary concept of Grameen Bank. A concept that was originated and tested in Bangladesh is now sought after all over the the world to bring the poor out of age old poverty. The name of Bangladesh is now mentioned with peacekeeping in almost all the troubled spots in the world. The work of Bangalee Peacekeepers in Somalia, Angola. Cambodia, Bosnia, and many troubled places is a source of national pride, for the international role of our armed forces. The quick and effective way the Bangladesh Army Medical Team vaccinated the Somalian civilians to prevent an imminent epidemic of cholera is an exemplary case of public service. At home, during this crisis, the Bangladesh Armed Forces played a role that would be cited as a model for all the democratic countries. They have proved their professionalism. They have left no doubt among the people that the Armed Forces in Bangladesh is completely under the civilian control as in any other democratic country. Bangladesh Armed Forces is now a partner of the people towards the national struggle to achieve a democratic, prosperous and strong Bangladesh. As an ex-military man, today I am proud and happy that the Armed Forces I once served has matured into a professional and dedicated national institu-

The crisis is over. Now is the time to go back to work. The factories will open again. The shops will be busy with customers. Streets again will be full of vehicles. The foreign garments buyer will fly in. The silent cities will resonate with the sounds of activities. After this nightmarish experience, the nation will rise again to fulfil its promise to build a prosperous and peaceful place for the posterity. Let's tell the world loudly that Bangladesh is open for business again.

Politics: Nothing Official About It

by Shamsad Mortuza

F everything that is said and expressed, one can ask: Why? It is the simplest question-word that has the aura of pedantic inguisitiveness, and often idiosyncrasies. When at the backdrop of Wills World Cup, Pepsi launches its 'anti-official' campaign with the pay-off line; Nothing official aboust it, one is tempted to ask --why!/?

The answer lies in the official move taken by the rival leverage, Coca Cola. Not understanding why the cricketing stars, including one veteran umpire, have started saving 'Nay' to the official drink, the Coke-walas lodge a case against Pepsi. They are the official drink and they go by the book.

Don't ask why! It is an endless question that can ripple away even to our political scenario. Especially, after the end of the cricket gala, the focus is once again shifted to politics and an analogy of the official/nothing official debate finds its ground here in Bangladesh.

Our officious guardians. once awarded with the right to rule, can very well boast of their officialdom. They look back only to feel content that the people, though 31 per cent of them to be precise. flooded them with their rights to nurse the infant democracy'. Now that the infant has grown up into a 'six years old pigmy sized darling, they find it their further duty to see through its adulthood.

The official holy book, however, is a bit rigid in this matter. It fixes the tenure of the officials and at the end of it there must be an election seeking new mandate of the people. Some of the incumbent officials think why bother our respected voters. Let them watch TV and dishes at home while our pets will do the rest.

But there shouldn't be anything unofficial about it. They appointed a priest to carry out the holy ritual (which eventually turned into a carnival). they summoned the olivestained, knee-shivering gladiators and ignored the absence of competitors. They were obsessed with the dream of getting hold of all the strings.

In protest, the opposing camp kept on chanting: Election, nothing official about it. Like Dickey Bird they raised hands, like Kambli they threatened slit-throat, like Dominic Cork they shot Bang!

government and graciously ac-

cept the same. At the same

Bang! like Walsh and others they yelled Nay to the official move. But the umpire ruled out all the protest and the defending champions went back to the Louis I. Kahn designed pavilion

A deft official move of holding the election on the eve of some holy holidays refrained the opposition from immediately taking to the streets. Only the press became witness to the low turn-out, gross rigging and sporadic violence, in one word, some say, a major Magura.

Naturally, these reports could not make the head official happy. You should have gone to the village, and there you would have got the real picture, she said.

Wow! They voted in the rural areas and you got MPs from everywhere. De la grande officialdom. No country, except perhaps one or two, felicitated, no friendly nation approved, and we got yet another ruling body.

It seems the whole country is engrossed in officialese, in theoretical jargons. When the Opposition leader alleged 'subtle rigging in 1991, the whole country failed to understand it until it transformed into a gross one in 1996. when the Opposition walked out of the Parliament demanding 'caretaker government' the mass had hiccups in understanding the meaning of it And now the government itself recognised the term, with slight moderation, of course,

Our politicians speak in a language which is far from common people's apprehension. Every night, they flock near their radio sets thinking the overseas radio stations will air an interpretation of the political rhetorics. What a day labourer finds is that he has to pay an extra 5 taka per kg of rice, what a farmer finds is the scarcity of fertilizer. The list can be extended upto the hori-

The officials feel safe at the thought these distressed mass will form a pressure group against the agitators and they will be able to legitimize their 'official' move. To help getting such anti-agitation sentiment, the officials brewed more words, more rhetorics.

But neither of the parties are interested in sharing the words at a round table. Conse-

quently, the whole nation is journeying from one rhetoric to another. The newspapers are making our vocabulary enriched day by day. We are learning only to forget

in the 60s we learnt autocrats, in the early 70s we learnt razakar, in the 80s we (re)learnt army turnedpseudo-democrats. Now in the mid-90s all these men behind the terms are having a festival

Bangladesh was born in blood and tears. Victory raised great hopes of progress in peace, of harmony in collective toil. Before long, the hopes crashed into deepening despair. The 25 years of independence was brutalized by conceited dogmatism, cycle of macabre killings, rapacity of the corrupters of power, and above all by the shedding of innocent blood and the un-

mourned loss of faceless many. Everything was done in the name of the people, with the pious declaration of the establishment of their rights and the betterment of their lots.

The latest in the chain of tragic events is the battle of attrition that ensued in the winter of 1994. Brought out of the closet, in the wake of Maguramess, the caretaker concept was a strong glue to hold the disparate forces of opposition together. Soon, the differences broke out of mutual restraint to take the menacing shape of coarse hostility. Riding the crest of hartals, it turned in to maddening fury, with the spirit of working together, in

The situation was allowed to drift. Both the forces, the one in power, and the others out of power, pursued one goal, to humble the other. Even the attend to. In this gladiatorial

CORRIGENDUM

Sameera's article "1971 -

A Tragedy and Its Conse-

quences", published in this

page on March 26, 1996.

the professor of engineer-

ing was inadvertently

named as Dr Md Nasser

Actually, it was late

regretted.

In Sayyeda Tun Noor

dal system where democracy is just an official term which will have nothing official about it. tion. The nation showed an ex-OPINION Put the People First

Syed Maqsud Jamil unlettered in politics could un- contest, it does not matter adopted the policy of rope a dope', as successfully used by Muhammad Ali against George Foreman in 1974; hang on the ropes, absorb the punches, let the opponent wear out. However, the government was

the country's not-so-firm in-

will aim at forming a neo-feu-

frastructure. All their attempts

badly mauled in the process. On the other hand, the opposition stuck to the policy of aiming hard at the pivotal point of the ruling party's power and prestige. Obviously, all the guns were cocked on the Prime Minister. Thinking that if she falls from the pedestal, the government will bite the dust. In doing so, they used the people as pawn. It has subjected the common people to much of misery. This may prove to be their Achilles heel. As the battle grew in intensity. both the contenders, found themselves in a situation where the convenience of the people, the welfare of the

country, became very hard to

derstand that the government who won, but it is certain the people continue to suffer; the economy is badly crippled, the country has sunk to the lowest

The 2-day hiatus in the non-cooperation movement brought back a semblance of normalcy to as it is now. But there is no way of putting your head into the sand. We are facing the brink! At this precipitous position, choices have narrowed down to, only two. One holds a peaceable and the other a dire prospect. The peaceable prospect calls us to chart a new course of conciliation, where the people and the country are the prime consideration. If it is to be given a chance, the foot soldiers of brinkmanship and adventurism should be sent to the barracks. The dire prospect has no place for people. It will push the country over the precipice. May be into the ravine of senselers savagery; where the people will be barbarised for

no fault of theirs. History tells, when madness rules, the ordinary are drafted as fodder.

The present situation therefore demands reflection of great discipline, conscientious action guided by trust and respect. For no patriotic citizen can live with the moral guilt of wearing the crown or of hoping to wear the crown by aban doning the people to unjust suffering. Let them put off their robes of politicians, and come down to being plain ordinary human beings. From there, the acts of brinkmanship and adventurism will indeed look brutally selfish and

There never perhaps was a grimmer time of this proportion. It is simple arithmetic. The two major parties of our country command a following of about 80 per cent of the electors. Together, they constitute the most effective guarantors of civic peace and progress. It is their chance to prove that they are worthy of this public trust. If they are to earn public trust, they will have to learn to work with each other, with a spirit of mutual respect and accommodation. They will have to act with honesty to prove it. We hope and pray, they do.

Dhaka Day by Day Vive Les Vendors

by Fayza Haq

time. Buying from the ferrywallah I get my tomatoes and cabbages fresh and the price is

minara Haq, who lives in Kathalbagan, gets her ruhi. hilsha, koi and chingri (prawn) from the travelling fish-sellers. She is glad that she does not have to muck around in crowded shopping areas where domestic help compete with each other in the smelly shop-

Poultry is another commodity that is sold from house to house in Dhaka.

the chicken for the table. I bargain at the doorstep and buy six chickens at a time. clean and cut them up, putting the chicken pieces in packets to use in due time. Women vendors in Mirpur deal with

saris shalwar-kameez pieces and artificial jewellery. "I buy the required items for my maids from these visiting salespersons. Sometimes the Tangail saris are so good that I keep them for myself, friends and relatives," says Mrs.

Salma Chowdhury, who lives in Pallabi, Mirpur. "I'm glad that the ferrywallas sell blouses and petticoats with the saris," says Mrs. Nasima Huq who lives in Bakshibazar and has three maids to do her work. "This way I can give the money to my maid-servants and they can buy what pleases them best, including ribbons and laces," she adds. "The maids love bargaining and they can spend their free

afternoon in this way, and get their essentials at the

Toys, ice-cream and peanuts are other items sold all over Dhaka city by travelling salesmen. The ice-cream man has a van which he often paddles with a cycle, while the badamwalla wears bells on his feet, red clothes and a red cap to draw attention. The toy seller has masks. balloons and toys on wheels for the young ones at reasonable prices.

In another era, in Dhaka, you could even get exotic and exquisite embroidered shawls from Kashmir from the travelling salesman. Today he limits himself to plastic household goods, , aluminum cooking utensils. lungt, gamchha, (indigenous version of towel) cheese, fruit, muri, and mats. Despite all modernisation, the services of the vendor who goes from house to house cannot be undermined. He or she reduces the housewife's labour and adds to the joy of bargaining at the doorsteps.

professor Dr Nurul Ula of Electrical and Electronics Department of BUET who took pictures of the It is not everybody in Dhaka who enjoys go-Jagannath Hall Massacre in ing to the big markets to do his or her shop-1971. The errof is ping. Dilara Khan buys her vegetables from roving vendors near the Abahani Math (playground) and is pleased with herself. "If I had to go to New Market it would cost me nothing less than Tk 25 to go and come each

> reasonable," she explains. Another housewife, Jasping centres.

Shamim Akhter, who lives in Tikatully, says. "I don't have to keep servants to buy

HOMZ DAT,

Dunblane and political decency

Sir, You must have been seeing the reaction of the British Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition at the sad massacre of children at the Dunblane Primary School in Scotland by a psychotic person. It is indeed a great tragedy that 16 little school children of a primary school lost their lives. It is a national

loss for the British people. The spectacle which has touched my sentiment is that the top politicians (both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition) of the country did not spare any time to visit Dunblane together and express together their profound sorrow at the national tragedy. It is a time of national sorrow and the two responsible leaders rose above political differences. Responsible nalanders all over the

their political differences at the time of national calamity and at the time of national re-

The Sri Lankan world championship of crickets made the Sri Lankan people ecstatic irrespective of their political differences.

During the last few weeks we have had the opportunity of witnessing the Australian and the Spanish general elections. In both the cases the party in power for the last one decade lost but the losing leaders gracefully accepted defeat and went into analysing why the voters took away support from them. They will work hard to regain their lost popularity so that they may come to power again after five years. The Indian, the US, the British elections will be held soon and thanks to the television we will all see these elections of successful democracies from which we will have lot to larn.

How I wish we may one da."

see our leaders together at moments of national joy and sorrow and also accept graciously that defeat, at parliamentary elections is normal under democratic system of

time it should also be ensured that the elections are free and fair in all respects. In the interest of peace and progress and transparency leaders of all shades of opinion and eminent jurists and representatives of business community should, without wasting any time, sit down to straighten out all differences

> torical facts without any reservation. Let them chalk out the future so that posterity may not shame us for our inability to leave a solid future for them. Let them not see themselves as citizens of a nation of

to come to consensus on mat-

ters of national interest and

call a spade and accept all his-

poverty surrounded by nations of affluence. Let not our future generations be suppliers of only menial manpower to the rest of the world.

The responsibility also lies with the journalists to mould public opinion to that end.

P G Muhammad New Eskaton, Dhaka

"Stop killing..."

Sir. Dr A K M A Quader.

Professor of chemical engineering department. BUET. blamed Election Commission (EC) for all misdeeds done on February 15, in his letter "Stop killing in the name of repolling" published in your esteemed daily on Saturday. March 16, 1996. Whether or not Dr Quader acted upon the dictations of his conscience l don't know, but I have several

questions for Dr Quader. 1) Did EC give deaththreats to voters going to cast vote on the election day? 2) Did EC deploy bomb throwing killers?

3) Did EC attack and send injured polling officials to hospitals? 4) If the opposition alliance had enough confidence in people, why didn't they allow spontaneous participation of

people on election day?

5) Why the opposition had slogans like "He who would go to cast vote would return as a corpse"? And again, I have some additional questions: Who intro-

duced one-party system and killed multi-party democracy? Who ousted in 1982 a competent president and killed a le-

gitimate government? Md Badrul Alam Dhaka