The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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Morale of the Officials

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party has demanded of the neutral caretaker government to remove officials, alleged by the party, to have played a political role at the fag-end of the opposition's non-cooperation movement. They have gone so far as warning to launch 'a movement' if their demands were not met; because, according to them, with the 'partisan secretaries' in office, no fair polls can be held. Earlier on, and throughout the tenure of the government, as anybody will recall, the Awami League had expressed an apprehension about the then ruling party having resorted to a flurry of administrative postings and transfers with an allegedly partisan angle to influence the outcome of elections.

The two demands cannot be weighed on the same scale. The former relates to value judgement under very exceptional circumstances and the latter concerns administrative moves followed in a democracy ahead of polls.

Administrative shufflings are now expected to take place at the behest of the neutral taker government whose very natural objective would be to regear the administrative set-up towards staging free and fair polls. Whether it will pursue the BNP's demand for punitive action against certain officials being branded as partisan should, of course, be left entirely to the good judgement of the neutral caretaker government. Yes, there have been questions making a round about a critical threshold being crossed by not a small body of government officials. But then we cannot take any snap-shot or fragmentary view of such things. It must be seen in a holistic man-

ner. We have three specific points to make about the episode. Firstly, the neutral caretaker government is not only the end-product of an all party consensus it is also the accelerated outcome of the proximate events. Not all of these were honed to perfection, nor could they be, but then in all fairness let's own these up gracefully and cooperate in real earnest now with the caretaker government to help it get on with its election work. Secondly, the bureaucracy should not feel threatened or be demoralised at this critical juncture when they have to attend administrative backlogs and the electoral process all at the same time and under tremendous pressure, as it is. In this regard we welcome the stand taken by Chief Adviser Habibur Rahman who clearly said that "government employees have no scope to express solidarity with any quarter." Let them do some soul-searching and self-analysis to determine the degree of their fallibility or infallibility as government officials during the crisis period. Last but not the least, there should not be any further politicisation. fragmentation or dissension in the bureaucracy.

Flush out Arms

We express our deep concern at the unusual concentration of arms and ammunition on the DU campus. Alarmed by the heavy smuggling of different kind of lethal weapons, the DU syndicate held a meeting and decided to inform the Chief Adviser of the caretaker government of the explosive situation developing there. This is no doubt a good move but time is fast running out for a decisive action. The fact that armed cadres of different political parties and their student fronts have considered the DU halls to be their shelters as well as battle-grounds is a very bad signal for our national politics.

We know that the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) has a large following on the DU campus and their rivalry against their opponents might have intensified against the backdrop of the non-cooperation movement. Already a number of JCD activists, including the general secretary of Bangladesh Agriculture University unit, have been captured with arms in different parts of the country. A heavy concentration of arms on the DU campus only shows that rival student wings are engaged in an unhealthy competition to establish their superiority over one another in terms of muscle-power.

So here is a grave challenge for the neutral caretaker government. Such an arms race at the campus is definitely going to make the new administration's job more difficult. Hence no time should be lost to flush out the armed goons from the halls.

Instead of opting for a show of force the rival student fronts can make their political scores if they just concentrate positively on the process of general election that is about to get underway. Since the BNP has helped in establishing a caretaker government there is no point frustrating the process that has the potential to be a unique example for the developing countries. But the system must be properly tended to derive the full benefit from.

Time out for Manch-es

The Bijoy Manch (victory podium) was dismantled by its organisers after it had served a historic purpose. Mayor Mohammad Hanif, the driving force behind it, has acted wisely. The city needed to recover from the paralysing situation it was in for a long time. As the city father, he should know better than anyone else how people suffer even in normal traffic congestions and so why add more to these by railing make-shift structures on the roads?

Now that a new administration has taken over and a fresh political process is about to begin, we must attend to our economy, business, administration and all other normal functions without any hindrance. It is, therefore, our hope that all the platforms erected by different political parties must be removed soon. The BNP rather got into it late. But their purpose seems also to have been served by now. There is no use obstructing traffic when it can be avoided.

With the political process moving forward, focus will now be shifting on to the constituencies of candidates. Meanwhile, the cities' main thoroughfares must be left as little impinged upon as possible.

Learn from the Past, Shape the Future

so much adverse impact sustained by the economy.

by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad At this time, the most important thing in the national life is to bury the past violent enmity and build on the convergence achieved after so much bloodletting, so much of sufferings by so many, and

concerned should cooperate on these two vital matters in their own and national inter-

ELIVERANCE at last.

But I am much sadden-

ed that so many people

had to lay down their lives in-

the political conflicts leading

to this return to sanity. I pray

for the salvation of their souls.

Nevertheless, I wish to

congratulate all concerned for

the convergence. March 30,

1996 was finally the day on

which it occurred - a neutral,

non-party cáretaker govern-

ment took charge. The Awami

League and its partner political

parties in opposition have

done very well indeed in driv-

ing home to the BNP that the

path they were embarked upon

was one of folly. For staying the

course and intensifying the

movement with dogged de-

termination and unflinching

perseverance, the Awami

League and the other opposi-

tion political parties deserve

congratulations. All others

whose active participation

strengthened the movement

are also to be thanked. For fi-

nally seeing the reality, even if

just before the 12th hour, and

not prolonging the agony and

sufferings of the society any

further, the BNP has surely

The armed forces have en-

hanced their image by not in-

terfering with the political

process and, in addition, play

ing a correct role when called

out to help restore law and

order. This maturity within the

armed forces is indeed a wel-

come development and should

lease of life in the country with

the people again gaining a

chance to vote freely and fairly.

Hopefully, that will be ensured

by the caretaker government

cerned. At this time, the most

important thing in the national

life is to bury the past violent

enmity and build on the con-

vergence achieved after so

much bloodletting, so much of

sufferings by so many, and so

much adverse impact sus-

tained by the economy. The

political parties should give

the highest priority to seeing

that the run up to the forth-

coming parliamentary election

and the election itself are free

from violence and wrongdoing

Let there be a replay of Febru-

ary 1991 parliamentary elec-

The overriding mandate of

the caretaker government is to

ensure that the forthcoming

parliamentary election to be

held in about two months time

is fair and free. But, it cannot

do that unless the law and

order situation sufficiently im-

proves. Hence, restoring law

and order has necessarily to be

a top priority of the caretaker

government. Also, the econ-

omy has been so shattered that

urgent attention must needs

be given to reviving produc-

networks. The economy can

tion, exports and distribution

not withstand a further period

of uncertainty and inaction. All

tion — only better.

with support from all con

Democracy has got a new

be thankfully acknowledged.

done itself a favour.

Mindful that the next elected government will have so much to do to restore order and put the society and the economy back on track, I wish to propose that it implement, as a top priority, the four-point agenda outlined below in order to ensure inclusiveness, fairness and transparency in the governance process so that the advent of corrosive politics again in future can be avoided and democratisation of society and equitable economic progress facilitated. Three of the proposals except that concerning the economy outlined below have been much discussed and there can be no differences of opinion about them. In fact, all the political parties that fought Ershad autocracy agreed to implement them while they were partners in struggle But, once in power, the BNP chose not to deliver. And the nation has suffered so much as a conse quence of the resurgence of violent political conflicts. Let this lesson, thrown up again by similar unsavoury events only about five years after the last round, not be lost on the polit ical parties and all others concerned. The proposed agenda

is as follows: 1. Hitherto there has been a monumental absence of public accountability in Bangladesh Whims, caprices and corruption of individuals in high places have been the main factors behind policy making, policy changes, and programme adoption and implementation rather than careful analyses of pertinent issues and possible implications. All this must go. To establish public accountability, which is an essential ingredient of a truly democratic order, must therefore be a top priority for the new government that will come to power following the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

2. Independence of the judiciary and the rule of law must be established. The situation has degenerated so much that those who are in positions of power or have access to power or have the financial capacity behave and act as if they were above the law. Hence laws, where necessary, must be enacted or amended, but it is absolutely important that the practice and implementation

of laws and rules be ensured. 3. A free press is absolutely essential in a civilised, democratic society. In Bangladesh, television and radio have hitherto been used by governments

almost as their mouthpieces Institutional arrangement and legal safeguards must be introduced so that radio and television can function as truly autonomous organisations serving the interest of the nation as a whole, and not of the gov ernment or any particular po-

litical party or interest group. 4. Economy. In the short run certain steps aimed primarily at shoring up the economy will need to be implemented urgently. The most important concerns in this category relate to revitalising productive activities by ensuring necessary imports for the industrial sector and availability and appropriate distribution of necessary inputs le g fertilizer, energy for irrigation) in the agricultural sector, re viving the export sector putting the financial institutions back in orderly functioning, and ensuring access of the extremely vulnerable people to food. Speed and coordination will be of vital importance in addressing the crucial aspects concerning these and other areas calling for immediate at tention.

In so far as foreign exchange reserve is concerned it is still quite healthy at about 2.3 billion US dollars. Steps should be taken on an immedi ate basis so that any further strain on it can be avoided or at least reduced substantially This will call for necessary measures to help improve export earnings and, at the same time, contain an unsustainable import expansion. The question of devaluation of Taka will have to be faced up to, keeping in focus both its positive and negative impacts and what the outcome will be on balance given the realities on the

But, I also strongly feel that the overall management of the economy being pursued within the framework of the economic reform programme, or Washington Consensus as it is also known, needs to be seriously reviewed. The success on the stabilisation front achieved earlier came unstuck lately. Moreover, in spite of all these years of vigorous implement tion of reforms an acceleration of economic growth and a breakthrough in poverty alleviation have remained as elusive as ever. Neither domestic savings nor investment has picked up much. Productivity has remained ludicrously low An extremely high level o unemployment (earlier estimated at about one-third of the available labour time) has exacerbated further over the past several years. Taking all these aspects into consideration, it

is clearly essential that a serious review is made of the pace and pattern of the reforms being implemented.

Indeed, the package of reforms being implemented in Bangladesh is the same as is implemented in most other reforming countries around the world, promoted and sup-

ported by the World Bank, the IMF and other donors. The reality on the ground in relation to the level of development, factor endowment, pattern of production, socio-economic participation, and geopolitical reality widely differs from country to country; and many reforming countries in-

cluding Bangladesh have got precious little to show by way of moving the economy forward from vigorously reforming. In would, therefore, strongly recommend that a review of the reform programme is urgently undertaken as the new government takes power, with reference to the socioeconomic realities facing this country in order to make appropriate adjustments so that progress can be made, on a sustainable basis, towards the ultimate goals of growth and poverty alleviation.

OPINION

In Victory Magnanimity, in Peace Goodwill

Hopefully the Prime Minister after having fulfilled her constitutional obligation(?), has resigned to pave the way for a neutral caretaker government to take over the interim administration. This brings to an end two decades of military dictatorships sometimes open and sometimes by proxy. The two political parties which ruled the country twenty out of twenty five years of its existence were spawned and nurtured by the then military establishment For the second time since 1975 people have got an opportunity of bringing about a qualitative change in the polit ical scene.

The 1991 election offered a historical opportunity to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and her party to restore a democratic polity after a long hiatus. Instead, her regime got characterized by non-gover nance, politicization of admin istration and destruction of a civil society. Corruption which was institutionalised and given a place of honour in the society by a former president H M Ershad, once again, got a boost under the patronage of the prime minister and her cronies. The facts are too well known to bear any repetation.

People of this hapless land are clamouring for a change a change which will, once again, put the people back at the centre stage through their elected representatives in truly representative parliament. This places a great onus on the opposition group, spe cially the Awami League which spearheaded the anti-Khaleda Zia movement

One has to bear in mind that the track record of two other important constituents of the opposition alliance smacks of chicanery, corruphypocrisy and fraud --- to name just a few of their abuses The Jamaat has never been in power and hopefully, will never be, but it will be an af front to our conscience and sacrifice of the martyrs if we try to gloss over their role during 1971 Lest we forget let me request the readers to visit the Mukti Joddha Museum and see the photographs of Gulam Azam and Maulana Mannan parleying

A concerned citizen

with butcher Tikka Khan. Therefore, the nation as a whole expects the Awami League to resurrect democratic institutions from the ashes of the past and restore the lofty ideals of this nation which struggled against rescolonialism and all forms of exploitation. The past successive military and quezi-military govern-

ments have destroyed the moral and ethical fibres of the society which ensure social cohesion. The nation is divided more than ever before. Political expediency took precedence over national interests. Institutions which are supposed to safeguard democratic values and promote democratic ambience, such as, Election Commission, Public Service Commission, Univ. ersity Grants Commission universities, civil service (specially field administration) have been denigrated to position of servitude. Democracy in a piuralistic society can hardly survive if these institutions are subjected to the control of executive and made to serve the interest of a particular group. The result is the society stands disintegrated today and needs to be reshaped and rebuilt on eternal human values. We must strive to achieve a collegial society where every member will care for others and share the benefits — a sharing and caring

vide another opportunity to the genuine democratic forces to respond to the expectation and aspiration of this nation. The opposition alliance should not be carried away by the euphoria of a popular uprising and successful overthrow of a regime which lost its credibility and moral and political authority to govern. Janatar Mancha symbolises this people's power - it belongs to people — and the Awami League articulates this power Ultimately, it is the PEOPLES POWER which determines the destiny of a nation.

The next election will pro-

society

The regime which comes into power after the next election will have an uphill task to perform. On the one hand, they will have to rebuild the

institutions severely mauled by the out-going administration and on the other, lay the foundation of a truly democratic society — a society responsive to the hope and aspiration of this vast magnitude of people. It is, no doubt, a formidable task not achievable in the short run; nevertheless, the nation would like to see that correct course is charfed out Let us hope and pray that those who are soon going to assume power in the name of the people will go down in

history as one who saved the

society from disintegration and

restored its pride.

Economy stands shattered institutions destroyed, society disrupted; in other words, the new regime will inherit a legacy needing a complete overhaul. Rehabilitation of economy will obviously take precedence over other issues. Likewise, rejuvenating the rural economy fruined by total neglect and positive discrimination) will call for concerted and sustained efforts. Restructuring of damaged institutions will need careful planning with clearly set goals and objectives Articulation of their philosophy with competent and committed personalities at the helm will save them from further ruination. Politicisation and militarisation of civil administration must stop. An honest and efficient civil service is expected to carry out the state policy free from control of a party or group. Civil servants are the servants of the Republic and that role should be safeguarded. Neutrality of civil servants must be guaran-

At this critical juncture of our history, let us recall a famous saying of Sir Winston Churchill:

In war Resolution In defeat Defiance in victory Magnanimity In peace Goodwill

We have won the battle. Let us put at rest animosity of the past, be magnanimous and extend goodwill to our former advers-aries. Let us once again join hands together to rebuild this nation for the good its 120 million souls. This should be our vow on the 25th anniversary of our independence.

Country's loss

Sir. We are one of the biggest readymade garment manufacturers and exporters to Europe. At the moment we are facing very serious problem with our buyers due to the political situation in our country.

We enclosed here with the comment of one the many buyers which was faxed to us on 28/03/96.

Fax to Vertex AG Mr M A

Gani This is for your information but you may also wish to convey it to appropriate authori-

As you know Hamlet made significant investment to set up full support office in Dhaka to increase the export business from your country.

We believe in the good services of the suppliers we are dealing with and would not have made this investment if we had not, even though we are fully aware of doing business in Bangladesh in regular times is not easy.

The situation now, however, is giving cause for real concern. As news of your country's problems filter through via news reports, and Reasons for late delivery, our customers are getting very nervous about placing business with us for A/W season in the knowledge that the production would be bookets in Bangladesh. I think it is important that you know this from an outsider's prospective.

My points no doubt may have little effect with your political leaders but if they do not recognise this situation, from the country's future trash point of view, I believe a missive amount of foreign traps may be lost. I am certain other big companies in the UK and other countries are feeing similar pressures from their own customers. Already some retailers in the UK are refusing to book orders for Bangladesh production.

Hamlet's commitment to your country is clear and visible with a large office equipped and staffed to take care of our business. However, our customers do not have to buy from us and as our service becomes unreliable as has been the case over the past month, the future business becomes more and more difficult to secure. No doubt this is why so

many factories have poor capacity from May/June onwards, as future orders dry up. I write this not in a critical

way, but hopefully in a realistic way of the situation as I see it. This is a personal comment from an import buyer visiting your country 5/6 times every vear for the past 4 years. I enjoy visiting yr country. The people do not have an easy life but I have always been treated in a friendly manner and I hope I have been equally respectful in return. In my experience the majority of suppliers in Bangladesh have done their best, sometimes in difficult circumstances to look after my business. I hope it can continue?

David Martin Hamlet International PLC Hamlet House, Fieldgate Street, London

We will be obliged if you kindly publish this comment in your daily, so that the people and our political leaders can see which direction we are heading for .

M A Gani Vertex Fashion Ltd 58 Motifheel C/A, Dhaka

The word 'people' should be exempted

Sir, the word 'people' ought to be scrapped from the speeches and proclamations of the politicians. Our politicians who are already wellknown through their adulteration, nepotism and power-hunger have surely lost their moral right to use this word in their demands and decisions. They are conflicting with their political rivals claiming people's support behind them. One quarter of them are threatening the other that 'people' will resist the latter's move, while the former defies that the 'people' in their favour are still on the streets. But the truth is, neither the people are behind them, nor they (people) are on the street. These are their hired and armed hooligans supporting them and killing the innocent pedestrians or street urchins and destroying people's property. We people are only kept hostage to fulfil their lust for power. We have no platform to speak out for our sufferings. When we raise our voice, we are labelled with pro-this or pro-that party, and thus, we are terrorised by the goons. I told earlier.

We no longer require these below average leadership. They only know how to use us in clinging to power and forget the promises immediately afterwards. We are already fedup with these leaders and their allies.

Let the hapless people come out of their nasty grips.

One of the millions' distressed

"Thoughts on Bishwa

ljtema'

Sir, I have gone through the opinion under the "Thoughts on Biswa Ijtema" caption published in your esteemed daily on 4.3.96. Here I am not criticising the opinion of the writer but I am expressing my opinion too. My opinion in this regard is: if Tabligh gathering takes any decision to condemn the barbarity committed on Muslims in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir etc it may turn into a political gathering which, in course of time, will start to follow different political programmes. Then it will belittle the spirit of such big congregation next to Haj. It may be mentioned here that Muslims from all over the world join this Bishwa Ijtema. This year Muslims from around 90 countries participated in it with due religious fervour. But most of them were not from Muslim

India is a secular country. I think if Biswa ljtema asks the Muslim countries to stop genocide in Kashmir, ultimately the Indian government may put ban on Muslims to participate in it. Thus it will hurt the religious sentiment of the Muslims of India. Therefore, my opinion is, no political programme should be taken in Bishwa Ijtema. The O I C should do it. The O I C should be more active in this regard. Above all Bishwa litema is a non-political organisation. It is a Tabligh Jamaat' of Muslims from all over the world. So this should be removed from all sorts of political programmes. May we pray to Almighty to redress the sufferings of the Muslims of all over the world.

A M Kais Chowdhury Masdhair Gorsthan Road. Narayangani

Dhaka Day by Day

When Pets are Troublesome

by SMS Joya

there's more to it than just love and affection. The first few days you stick to the notion that the kitten you is amply happy with the dairy milk you feed it. It does seem to enjoy the milk of human kindness you give it. So you feed it and overfeed it until one day you're taken by surprise to see it actually sniff at the thoughtful dishes you've been giving it.

The kitten has weaned itself and finds most part of your food to be toothsome. Still obsessed with the idea of providing the kitten with sufficient food (other than a hefty share of your own chicken and fish) you start buying separate fish (specially Puti-fish - they love it)

for your royal highness. When it is a couple of months' older (still probably a teenager) and still growing bigger and fatter, you heave sighs of relief to finally see it go out whenever nature calls. However, you do have to be cautious about not letting it hang around the house for too long it might just have a moodswing. And when you try to get some sleep at the end of a long day - you

may just discover the

reason why the house has against it from the very beginning and also probably your lap. having the last laugh) to show everything is going Kauckle down to find the best vet in town which days makes your mum growl louder than the cat. After suddenly get hold of it - it's on the way to Bonga again.

To have a kitten as your pet may be a joyful Bazaar! Then you have to have a skirmish with experience at first but gradually you learn that your brother (who usually enjoys the company of the playful cat) about going to the hospital with

> Taking the crony-turned-pest to the hospital is one sitcom that makes even the flick 'Ace Ventura' a flop. You make deliberate efforts to put the puss in your hold-all to take it to the vet and keep on failing. Somehow, after managing to do so, the next

horror comes when it hears the discordant sounds of the car starting off. Literally, the bag starts up and down on your lap all the way to the hospital.

At the hospital, you'll be surprised to have to queue up even on Friday morning. All the while, all you can do is pet the puss to calm down after hearing a goat in labour making queer noises inside. Finally, your turn comes and the friendly chief veterinary officer takes a quick look at your cat and asks the attendants to check up its temperature. While the attendants take the reading through the rear of your puss (you might as well be 'shocked' to learn it the first time), the cat stares at you as if you're Judas himself and

been so fetid all day long. So you find it a bitter pill you strive to keep up a straight face. And the vet to swallow but strive to smirk ground the house writes off the prescription but you wouldn't even especially in front of your mother (Who's been up dare stop at your chemist with a capering bag on

All that hustle and bustle could've been avoided just great (indeed!). And life goes on until one day, only if they had the hospital telephone numbers you find your pussy not so happy with the mounds under useful telephone numbers in corporate of Puti-fish or chicken or milk you've been trying to diaries. One call to the hospital would simply feed it. It has lost its appetite - this time it is real. be enough for you to know that all your cat Also, it has run a temperature. Frantically, you needed was a Fimoxyl syrup 3 times a day for 5

From the third day of its medication, the making several phone calls to pet owners you get a cat regains its appetite and gradually vague idea about where to find just any net (let the becomes frolicsome again. At the end of the 'best' one go). You think hard to recall where you've day either it bestows itself to you and you know seen the sign that says CENTRAL VETERINARY that you've earned it after the bitter -sweet HOSPITAL. It keeps flashing back and you experience or you end up with a stinking bed