

No Compromise

Propelled by a series of exposes we ran on the corroded safety equipment base at ZIA, we even risk a drift today from electoral topicality in order to reiterate our concern over it with some dramatic effect. The intention obviously is to see the people in charge of civil aviation — of both the directorate and the ministry — jolted into action as soon as the election is over. The new government must get the files ready for putting the corrective measures in place at their earliest convenience.

In addition to being on a precarious perch with the mostly dysfunctional Crash, Fire and Rescue (CFR) vehicles and dearth of fire-fighting foam and gears, we have the equipment known as Disabled Aircraft Recovery System (DARS) introduced here 1991 and left under the open sky, remaining unserviceable. In 1993 it was revealed that if all the DARS parts were in order, the salvage of the DC-10 which had overshot the runway would have entailed a few hours instead of a week it took.

Since then we have had not very savoury correspondence with the British government which had originally helped us procure the equipment that has since fallen in disuse through a sheer lack of maintenance. The British were prepared to supply spare parts to make the equipment serviceable but we dragged our feet on the question of paying customs duty and VAT for the imports for some time. So mishandled has the matter been that they have urged 'speedy repair of the DARS' or face the 'withdrawal of their offer to fund the refurbishing.'

It is the outlook of the people concerned that need to be internationalised from what now sounds like a provincial mindset. The whole world touches down at the Zia International Airport, so to speak, and we have to abide by the international safety standards. Some time ago our chief sea entrepot Chittagong port came to be blacklisted by foreign shipping lines, due to political reasons though. And here now is the unpardonable callousness shown in maintaining and upgrading the safety preparedness at ZIA. Where do we go? Isn't the stake in aviation accidents far greater than the hazards in other areas of life?

A Wonderful Run-up

Electioneering in public ends today at midnight. How did our run-up to polls fare? Heavenly, to compare with that of the February 15 farce. Let it be so in the case of the June 12 proceedings. Gross and big-scale violation of the code of conduct has hardly been committed except for a faux pas involving the highest office in the land. Another virtual explosion with all the world's potential for dangerously harming the election was averted from turning into a real one, primarily by heeding counsel of putting off the army court of enquiry report till beyond the polls.

But some loss of life, specially the gunning down of Shahabuddin in Mohammadpur, could lead to bloody confrontation. And this too was not allowed to happen by the parties of the victims who wisely chose an avenging through the ballot.

It has been a relief not to have been subjected to garish visuals promotion and blaring high-decibel persuasion. All the polls of the recent past have been happily beaten by the candidates and their workers choosing to go to the voter's doorstep and setting examples of modesty and politeness.

All this is to the good. But there is a hidden side to all this couldn't-be-better boy scoutish atmosphere of bonhomie — no doubt a great achievement of the caretaker government and the Election Commission. It is not true that money is not moving and arms are rotting idly in underground stashes. Throughout Bangladesh, in spite of the very congenial setting, voters have turned very silent and sullen and evasive. Making the outcome very very unpredictable indeed.

The only thing that has so far emerged as eminently predictable is that voters will go by the merit of the candidates, their individual merit. Honesty, dependability, accessibility and a good name as a *bhalomanush* are going to pull most of the votes not committed politically.

Is there a chance of surprise? Can the projections of an evenly balanced outcome prove wrong and a sweep occur? Anything may happen, including violence in many many centres. Congrats all the same to the government for a wonderful run-up.

The Siren of a Fish

There is no better way to commit a package suicide, specially when it is a family package, than preparing and imbibing the *potka* fish delicacy. In close succession eight persons died last week in two incidents of *potka* fish poisoning, the latter occurring on the romantically named Shah-Parir Dwip in Teknaf.

Most of the victims of this tragedy came from very poor families who hardly have a choice in the matter of their daily menu. At the same time there are persons very close to water and fishes and very likely to be familiar with the poisonous globular fish. It is hardly possible that the ladies preparing the fatal dish did not know how to go about the job, extirpating the poison that is. Or that they were doing it for the first time. For it is generally the connoisseurs of the *potka* dish that go after it as if it were heaven sent manna, others dreading it for good reason.

Then how is it that people, mostly *potka*-loving families, keep dying from eating this interesting fish? Perhaps the expression playing with fire should be replaced with playing with *potka*. If man cannot be restrained from smoking and dying before time in pain, can he be weaned away from the delicious *potka* only because this may lead to death?

Democracy vs Kleptocracy: A Time for Change

What is needed today is a national covenant between civil and military bureaucracy on one side, with NGOs in the middle and political parties on the other side. These three interlocutors, among them, can make a pledge to the nation for transparency and accountability, the key to the success of future development.

I am personally disappointed that Madam Corazon Aquino could not come to Dhaka as a member of the election monitoring team. Her presence would have been symbolically most important in our context.

Aquino saved the Philippines and its democracy from a mix of dictatorial misrule and economic kleptocracy of President Marcos. US Congressman Stephen Solarz would, I am sure, miss her in his mission to help this country in preserving and safeguarding democracy and democratic values. Chief of EU Ms Zulueta and head of Commonwealth group Ghazali Shafie would think the same way.

Bengal has a combination of emotive creativity and individualism with a leaning of traditional values of family and religion — have historically rejected authoritarian or alien rule propped up by arrogance, greed and love of lore. That is why the British Raj, desiring to make India the

one and half lakh takas for a gas line over bakshesh could be as high as Tk 40,000; for water Tk 20,000 and for a telephone line about Tk 70,000. For the RMG sector (ready-made garments) the hidden cost for the exporters is over 90 million dollars per annum.

If you add to this the corruption at higher places as reported in various national dailies over the recent years, one would not be surprised at the grim picture given by the World Bank in Bangladesh. This report basically puts the entire government on the spot. By focusing on corruption on various nodal areas in Bangladesh, the WB has served this country well. It is a warning shot, the first salvo. If we want to move forward within the limits of democratic norms undergirding the civil society, we must arrest forthwith the behemoth of corruption, which is slouching back like the rough beast of W.B. Yeats to eat away the very fabric of our

derers of the father of the nation — and rewarding them with diplomatic assignments! Imagine what havoc it has caused on the psyche of our younger generation! Today they are rightly questioning the failure of our leaders especially those between August '75 and '90 as expressed in The Daily Star. Students Dialogue on Election '96.

Institution-building is a difficult task. The Constitution of Bangladesh reflecting the hopes and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh, sanctified by the blood of three million martyrs, was badly mangled with numerous amendments. In many ways the resonance in our constitution is identical with that of the American constitution. In 25 years, America went ahead in building institutions. 25 years on, Bangladesh has miserably failed to do likewise. Bureaucracy plays one of the most vital roles in institution-building in every country under the faithful direction of political

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



omphalos of the empire, allowed their officers serving in Bengal, as revealed by John Strachey, War Minister in the British Labour government, in his book, *The End of Empire*, certain amount of latitude in financial discipline. It didn't help them. The British had to shift their capital from Bengal to New Delhi.

It is widely accepted that in spite of some positive economic reforms undertaken by the government of Begum Zia, her five-year rule has been characterised by widespread corruption, phenomenal rise in terrorism and recidivist culture and a general breakdown of law and order because of politicisation of almost every organ of the statecraft, including bureaucracy, by party zealots. The above picture has been given international credence by the World Bank report of March '96, 'Government that Works'. Supervised by the soft spoken Cambridge graduate Pierre Tendell-Mills, chief of World Bank in Dhaka and his deputy Owaiss Sadat, the report is historic in its import. It is for the first time that the World Bank has undertaken such an exercise on Bangladesh. It is plain and candid in its conclusion and direct and penetrating in its investigation. The report has given a disturbing picture of corruption in such public sector areas as energy, water, telephone and gas. To get a power line in one week you have to pay an amount of

national existence. The slide, accelerated at breakneck speed, under the past government, if not stopped now will give us a system not of democracy but of kleptocracy. In its latest report brought out by Transparency International, Bangladesh has been shown as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, having the honour of being third in the list! What is needed today is a national covenant between civil and military bureaucracy on one side, with NGOs in the middle and political parties on the other side. These three interlocutors, among them, can make a pledge to the nation for transparency and accountability, the key to the success of future development. Without blaming rival political parties for lack of investment in the country, we all, as a people, should own up our collective responsibility. Bureaucratic redtapism has often been blamed, blithely forgetting that only a transparent and accountable government can rid the society of road-blocks onto the path of development.

It is true that 25 years time is not after all very long in a nation's history. But it should have been possible for us to do the basic work of institution-building in the country over the past quarter century. The rallying power of law has been rudely prevented from working by interested coterie particularly with an amendment to the constitution giving indemnity to the self-confessed mur-

masters. This institution has been crudely abused by ruling parties. The forced and illegal retirement of some of the finest officers of the country, both civil and military, over the past five years has had pulverising impact on the country's institutions.

Every action has a reaction, and in the case of Bangladesh this dialectic syndrome showed its best in the popular upsurge when the top civil servants of the country refused to be cowed down and decided to speak out the truth — their constitutional obligation to the Republic.

Retiring an officer and framing false charges against him/her is a gross abuse of power and violative of constitutional and human rights of the officer concerned. With the partition of India, when various interest groups wanted the ICS cadre to be dismissed, Jawaharlal Nehru stood firm and reappointed them to work for the country and pressed into service their experience and wisdom in the greater interest of the country. In Bangladesh we have done just the opposite. Personal and narrow party interest has been given priority over national interest. This must stop.

Allow June 12 to become a red-letter-day in our history through free and fair election. Let the people decide through ballots that no conspiracy, overt or covert, can deprive them of their right to choose. The time for change has arrived.

To the Editor...

Functions of MPs

Sir, All employees of the public have their own functions determined by the government before their appointment to different departments and ministries. Accordingly their services are evaluated and promoted as per respective recruitment rules. If any employee fails to accumulate satisfactory service credit, usually his case is deferred for consideration for promotion. Sometimes they are demoted from their present posts for their unsatisfactory service records. But unfortunately can you find any definite functions or responsibilities of the honourable members of Parliament? Is there any scope to evaluate their public function to determine their eligibility for contesting in the next election? Clear reply will come 'No'. Why?

In America every senator works in his/her area i.e. his electoral area where from he/she has been elected by the voters. All development and administrative works are being done through him. Reasonably the public can evaluate the works of the concerned Senator and can easily give verdict for the next election. In Bangladesh we see that as per election rules no candidate needs to be enrolled in the voters' list and can contest from anywhere in any constituency. In this context it is revealed that a person not popular in his/her own region and probably very much disliked in his/her home district contest in the election from an area other than his/her own area because people of that area are unaware of his antecedents and character. By hook or by crook these people get ticket from a big party in lieu of donation to the party and slip from the clutches of cognizant people of his/her own area. This system in true sense cannot exist for a long time for the proper nourishment and development of democracy. I humbly suggest a few points for benign consideration of Election Commission and proper authority:

1. All citizens and eligible voters specially those who want to contest in the election must enroll names in the original area where they belong.
2. No political party and na-

tional policy should allow any person to contest in the parliament election beyond his/her district/area.

3. All elected honourable members of Parliament must stay in the constituency from where the people have given their verdict as their representative.

4. All administrative and development works must be done for his/her constituency through him/her.

5. An office for MP may be set up in each constituency provided with facilities for running an office, i.e. staff, transport, telephone, etc.

6. No honourable members of Parliament should be appointed head of any institution beyond his/her own constituency.

7. The Parliament secretariat may determine the definite function of the MP with the approval of proper authority as is done for the Mayor of the City Corporation, Chairman of the Pourashava and Union Parishad in Bangladesh.

8. The movement of the MPs should be restricted as per urgency required by their respective party leaders and the parliament session.

I humbly draw the attention of proper authority to consider the above points and if accepted they may be implemented for all parliamentary election, to come.

Tareq Mustafa
119, West Dhamondia, Dhaka

"A dog in the manger policy"

Sir, A letter captioned, 'A Dog in the Manger Policy' appeared in The Daily Star on 16 May. In my opinion, it is an example of moral degradation in our literature society. There is no such address in Uttara. It seems, the name may not be the letter-writer's name too. Though he pretended to be neutral (last para), the theme of the letter may be his own concern. Indirectly he got it published. Or, it could be a manifestation of his malice against the Kalyan Samity. Because, the tone of the letter smells as such. If it is his own case, then his such shyness is a mystery!

As an ordinary lessee of '76 and a resident of Sector-4 I,

would like to point out few facts of the issue. Uttara was planned circumspectly as a model town. So, in each sector there were spaces for 'community use' (school, park, playground, mosque, market, community centre, lake, shopping mall etc). Before the last regime, these spaces remained undisturbed. Even by then, some of the said facilities were made available in some sectors (Sector-3, Sector-7). But during the last regime, some apparently greedy allottees of newer sectors of Uttara, believably had connection and influence in RAJUK and Works Ministry. So they got their previous odd allotment transferred to better area, with better plots. They perhaps found must have first the then Works Minister as one of their category and on their side.

So, to materialise their plan, they first obliged the minister with a better and larger corner plot (front and side having wide open space), in the central area of Sector-3, between Rd-4 and Rd-7. This allotment was the talk of the town. But, as per RAJUK it was a regular case. So, with that blanket rule, the majority of that group got their previous allotment changed to better available plots. But MPs, secretaries and influential allottees who missed that bus, laid their hands on the space kept for 'community use'. They cut away a part of their choice and reduced it to plots and got it transferred like others did. So, the excuse of 'rising demand for land' made by the influential allottees was a hoax and eye-wash, in this context.

The area of Sector-4, (referred) is same as described. It started with mosque land, and injunction was imposed on all, as a matter of rule. If the identities of the 'incumbents' are exposed, then all cats will be out of the bag. The letter has stressed on the RAJUK's statutes. Any clause included there is certainly for the improvement of a planned township, and not for spoiling it. Kalyan Samity is for the welfare of the community. What was their lapse, if they acted to save Uttara, and welfare-oriented space for 'community use'?

AR Choudhury
House #39, Rd-11, Sect #4, Uttara, Dhaka-1230

Israelis Elect Netanyahu as PM: Peace Process in Jeopardy

Indeed, if Benjamin Netanyahu is a sensible politician who promises to lead a state like Israel which is surrounded by hostile Arab states, he should soon decide to abandon his earlier election rhetoric and engage in the peace process.

YIGAL Amer and Hezb-

ollah indeed won the general election in Israel. Yigal Amer killed Yitzhak Rabin and with him he thought, the peace process. Immediate reaction in Israel was, however, the opposite. Majority of the Israelis put flowers and candles on Rabin's casket with the silent promise to support his peace process. They flocked around Shimon Peres and put him far ahead of Benjamin Netanyahu in the opinion polls. Shimon Peres was highly confident and fixed the general election on May 29, 1996. But he had too many enemies around and also across the border. Hezbollah and its master financier decided to wreck the peace process and came heavily on Peres. Hezbollah carried out four suicide bomb attacks within Israel in two months time and also sent a couple of Katyusha rockets to Northern Israel that injured some Israelis. Peres fell into the trap. He misjudged the situation and reacted unwisely and disproportionately against Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. He could really do nothing to Hezbollah but devastated a large part of Lebanon by bombing civilian areas. The Israeli bombing of Qana brought international condemnation. This angered the entire Arab world. At home Peres started losing grounds both with Israelis and Arab Israelis. The result was a disaster for Peres — disaster at least for the time being for the peace process.

Benjamin Netanyahu was elected as the Prime Minister



rach government's political offensive.

Clinton Administration was hopeful of Peres's return as Prime Minister. Apparently Clinton's political advisers could not expect the tilt of a section of the Israeli population towards Benjamin Netanyahu in the aftermath of Peres's Lebanon adventure. As US interest in Israel is well known and could generally not be termed as political interference in the internal affairs of Israel, Clinton Administration would probably be more active in Israeli politics for the sake of continuing the momentum of the peace process.

It was widely feared that with the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as the Prime Minister, the peace process will suffer a serious set back if not halted altogether. Though Benjamin Netanyahu said immediately after his election that he was in favour of peace but peace with security, which he said, Shimon Peres failed to pursue.

Benjamin Netanyahu's 'peace' programme envisages not only security for Israel but also the following: No Palestinian State, no return of Golan Heights to Syria and no further surrender of occupied land to Arabs, delay in troops pull out from Hebron and other areas of West Bank, more Israeli settlements, etc. These are obviously the things that are bound to disrupt the peace process. However, if Benjamin Netanyahu has used these as slogans for catching votes and repeated them to the victory celebrating crowd

country should provide for a credible margin of votes or a second or third run for, any one to acquire mandate to lead any country. After all, fanatics, half lunatics, radicals, temporarily disturbed minds, may form such a small percentage of any population. So a lead of such percentage point should not be allowed to determine the fate of a nation or nations.

However, the elected leader of Israel should be above such groups of people and set political agenda keeping in view country's overall interest regardless of even his personal views on any issue. Security of Israelis is undoubtedly a must but this can be ensured not by continuing to occupy 'others' land but by returning their land with a smile and against a solid guarantee and thus creating an environment of friendship that is bound to last and provide the type of security that Benjamin Netanyahu and his supporters have been looking for. The programmes and the future action plan of Benjamin Netanyahu as stated by him before and after the election will bring disaster to his own people. Because such programmes will totally nullify peace gains achieved through Rabin-Peres-Arafat-US efforts and throw all Palestinians including Arafat's people and some other Arabs into the lap of Hamas. Hezbollah and other radicals promoted and nourished by the opponents of peace — Iran is widely believed to be the principle one.

Chairman Yasser Arafat while speaking at Oxford University yesterday said that he

Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad

by a very thin margin of even less than one percentage point. He got 1,501,023 votes and Peres 1,471,566. According to Israeli Election Commission 145,000 voters cast blank votes for Prime Minister apparently reflecting their displeasure with both the candidates. About 12,000 blank votes were cast by Arab Israelis 'presumably to show their anger over the military operation in Lebanon.'

Israeli election result stunned people around the world. In Israel also it was a strange situation — the whole nation was divided right down the middle. Columnist Henry Shaten wrote: 'Half of the public in Israel is now going around with a feeling that redemption is at hand' and the other believes that it is trapped in a hell on earth. Some rejoice, others weep. Yitzhak Rabin's wife's reaction was, 'All I want to do is pack my bags and get out of here.'

Shimon Peres was obviously shocked but observed the democratic norm and telephoned Benjamin Netanyahu to congratulate him. Later Peres said, 'We shall support the peace process wherever we shall be...' Arafat was reported to be stunned and shocked. His spokesman said — 'Benjamin Netanyahu should not be an adventurer. He should abide by the agreements signed by Israeli government.'

Though King Hussein of Jordan has already said some nice formal things and hoped to work with him on the peace process, the rest of the Arab world became worried at the election result. Syria termed Israeli election as tragic. Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad hurriedly met Egyptian Foreign Minister and later Egyptian President himself at Cairo. Other Arab leaders also got in touch with each other. The feeling is that Arab leaders must try to forge some form of Arab unity to combat new Is-

to please them, then it is fine. But if he intends to pursue them beyond the point of political tolerance, then he will not only enrage the entire Arab world but also bring back Intifada into the streets of West Bank and Gaza. Suicide bombers who have been waiting for the election results will probably be activated in no time and make streets of Israel totally unsafe. Benjamin Netanyahu should carefully read the statement of Hamas leader M Zahar. He warned that if Netanyahu halts the peace process, there will be 'a new wave of violence not only by Hamas, but by every Palestinian including the people who support the peace process.' This statement says two things — (i) Hamas did support the peace process which, however, remained in doubt and (ii) halt in the peace process will make Israelis more unsafe.

Netanyahu will make a serious blunder if he continues to think that sticking to more of occupied land will bring security to Israel. The self-declared security zone in South Lebanon has proved to the contrary. The occupation of others land is uncivilized and political domination of other people is abominable. These can never give security to any one. Rabin-Peres realised it well and could carry as per election result about half of the population of Israel with them. The fault does not lie so much with the democracy but with wrong or inadequate application of real ideas and principles on which democracy is based. The lead of less than one percentage point should not immediately confer leadership to some one. Israeli election with this thin margin of vote in favour of Netanyahu is threatening to change the fate of millions and millions of people in the Middle East. Real democracy probably never intended such a situation. The constitution of any

wanted to see East Jerusalem as the capital of the independent state of Palestine. He also asked Israeli government to withdraw its security forces from Hebron by middle of June, 1996 as agreed to by Peres government. He called upon Benjamin Netanyahu to abide all agreements signed between Israel and Palestinian Authority.

However, amid the present gloomy peace environment after Benjamin Netanyahu's election victory, there appears to be some ray of hope. Benjamin Netanyahu's political spokesman telephoned a top official of the Palestinian Authority and assured 'him of the continuation of the peace process. Indeed, if Benjamin Netanyahu is a sensible politician who promises to lead a state like Israel which is surrounded by hostile Arab states, he should soon decide to abandon his earlier election rhetoric and engage in the peace process.'

Here comes the crucial role of Clinton Administration. The Palestinians, the Arabs and the international community expect the US to put enough pressure on Benjamin Netanyahu so that he steps into the peace path already chartered without much hesitation and reservation. During his election year and after having worked so much on ME peace, President Clinton can not afford to allow Benjamin Netanyahu to play Yigal Amer on the peace process. Middle East peace is undoubtedly at a point of no-return. Even Benjamin Netanyahu cannot stop it, he can only delay it though at the cost of more lives. Peace and security or security and peace as envisaged by Benjamin Netanyahu can be achieved if Israel vacates occupied territories with agreed adjustments along some areas of the borders and under guarantees (plus stationing of peace-keeping forces) by the US and other big powers.

OPINION

Clouds over ME Peace Process

The result of the election for Israeli premiership which put forward a radical figure Benjamin Netanyahu, has created tension among the world's peace loving community. The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin was the first blow to the ongoing peace process. But Shimon Peres who took over the office remained faithful to his predecessor's commitment. And, as he himself was one of the partners of the peace process, he left no stone unturned to gear it up. The declaration of Peres that peace was more important than to win the election was a concrete evidence of his faithfulness to his commitment.

But the election results which put Mr Shimon Peres out of the race appeared to be the second and perhaps the biggest blow to the ME peace process. The Likud gained only a 7% victory over the Labour. It is too narrow a victory to boast of, but, of course, impossible to overcome. The Palestinians, dreaming of an independent state in the near future with Jerusalem as its capital, are feeling insecure, for the Premier-Elect Netanyahu, in his election campaign urged his people to be tough against them. As we know Mr Netanyahu's pledges included:

- 1) he would close the PLO Head quarters in Jerusalem, 2)

he would start to build new Jewish settlement in the West Bank, 3) he would authorize Israeli troops to conduct search for the terrorists into PLO-run autonomous zones, and 4) he would not cede the Golan Heights to Syria for a peace agreement.

But these are the vital points of the ME peace process for which the Palestinians gave up hostility and recognized the 'unwanted' Jewish State. So these issues are very sensitive and any initiative against these will create frustrations among the Palestinians and the radical groups will take the advantage out of the situation.

Now the burning question is whether or not Mr Netanyahu will remain an extremist as a Prime Minister. He won by a narrow margin and half of the population are against his radical views. In the Nasnet he won't have enough majority to beat the Labour. They will not let him do anything contrary to the commitment to peace. And the strongest barrier is that the Jewish State is openly under the thumb of the USA and their allies. It is the USA who initiated the peace process, forced the Israeli leaders to sit with the PLO leaders for a face to face dialogue and made them sign an accord with the PLO. So it is easy to compre-

hend that the USA will not tolerate any hindrance to it.

But as Netanyahu will have to form a coalition government with the help of some extremist small parties, he cannot afford to be too interested in the issues his partners do not like. Besides, as the PM of a conscious nation he cannot defy his election pledges. So he will obviously find himself in a dilemma and to overcome it he may choose to play a double game, in which the ME peace process may be the scapegoat. He will try his best at least to make the process slow.

But any delay in the peace process will instigate the extremists like Hezbollah and Hamas to bring back the hostility. They may start a propaganda, saying that the peace accord is nothing but the PLO's trick to end the Palestinian struggle against the Jewish state to realise their demands. The Hamas-Hezbollah declaration that the PLO chief was a 'traitor' might gain enough ground to take root. The fact is, if the Jewish settlement goes on, if the Israeli soldiers keep on oppressing the Palestinians as usual, and if the Palestinian leaders can do nothing about these, then the peace process will lose all its meanings.

Razak Raza
118/1 New Eskaton Dhaka