

No Compromise

Propelled by a series of exposés 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 unparable 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

Electing 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 boyscoutish 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, extricating 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.

Bengalee ethos — a combination of emotive creativity and individualism with a leaving 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 your baksheesh 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 specially 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 Lendell Mills, chief of World Bank in Dhaka and his deputy Owaise 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.

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 violation 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.

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

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To the Editor...

Functions of MPs

Sir, All employees of the republic 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.

3. 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 Dhanmondi, Dhaka

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

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"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 literate 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 spells 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, play ground, 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 (Sect-3, Sect-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"?

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Israelis Elect Netanyahu as PM: Peace Process in Jeopardy

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YIGAL AMER and Hezbollah 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 cemetery in the aftermath of Rabin'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 could 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 do.

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. 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 Israel 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 issues.

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The result of the election for Israeli premiership which put Mr Shimon Peres 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 peace was more important than to win the election was a concrete evidence of his faithfulness to his commitment.

But