

Going to the President

In an ambience of stressful parliamentary politics of parallel trajectories taken by the ruling party and the opposition, a positive vibration comes off Begum Zia's call-on meeting with President Shahabuddin on Monday.

The fact that the Opposition chose to approach the President with their complaints rather than plunging head-long into street politics — so very notoriously dreadful for the recent memories of that rabid confrontation — does the BNP a credit.

Dependency on the trouble-shooting role of the President at every awkward turn of events will reflect adversely on the capacity of our popularly elected representatives to work a parliamentary system where bipartisan frictions are to be accepted as part of political life.

The President has the prestige of his office and the moral clout, so to speak — and in Justice Shahabuddin's case he has plenty of it by virtue of his credentials of integrity, neutrality and wide acceptability — to intercede in a situation if the circumstances so demand.

Having said that, we urge the ruling party and the opposition to reactivate the business advisory committee of the parliament so that it can work to its full potential for liaison and damage limitation with the opposition returning to parliament at the earliest.

India Festival

Utsav, the literally justified 13-day Indian cultural programme began in the city yesterday with the unmistakable reminder of our communion in aesthetic appreciation.

Cultural programmes have a way of awakening our soul amid an anesthesising atmosphere of materialistic predominance. The evocative power appears all the more intense when the programme is on the culture of a country as tied as India is with us.

The fact that the commonness of aesthetic appreciation and cultural bondage is a matter of geographical proximity and historical traditions often tends to get lost in political acrimony. The natural expectation of a steady cultivation of cultural communication between India and Bangladesh has suffered through somewhat irregularly-held cultural exchange programmes.

Attempts at discrediting our integrity in recognising the very personalities and ideas that we loudly claim to have seminal significance in the whole range of the aesthetic repository stemmed from lack of self-confidence. Consciousness of political individuality does not have to lead us to cultural myopia.

Boggles the Mind

Yesterday's issue of a leading Bangla daily carried a disturbing visual, at the bottom-left corner of its front page. This was of a madrasah lad enchained from his foot upwards to a log he held in a painful balance on his right shoulder.

This, according to the report, was one of the lighter forms of punishment delinquents like the unnamed victim has been receiving.

The practice is medieval to say the least. This kind of training on morality can only recoil upon the entire purpose of education. Besides, it can spawn sadism and a persecution mentality.

The Caretaker Scorecard

Despite the missteps and confusion, the Caretaker Government's scorecard at this stage is certainly better than the "Average" mark, nowhere near the "Above Average" level. They need to change some of their own appointees and implement the Accountability Bill in letter and spirit for the ratings to go higher than what the mass perception attributes to them presently.

THE immediate period after the Presidential Proclamation dissolving the National Assembly (NA) and the consequential dismissal of the Benazir government has been of some confusion.

For some time now, people of all caste and creed representing a wide spectrum of opinion have not only been exhorting the President to do his constitutional duty to rid us of the odd couple that was holding this country in extra-constitutional thrall, but have also been rendering all sorts of advice as to how to apply the 'coup de grace'.

The Mohajir community does not have any confidence in him, for that matter neither do most other Pakistanis. One can live with the controversial Khwaja Tariq Rahim, but in Sindh, the President must not reinforce failure, he must correct the aberration of Mumtaz Bhutto's appointment before the situation is further compounded.

As things stand today, the country is riven with debate as to whether elections or accountability should come first. Having seen the treasury looted and themselves beggared, no doubt the populace is baying for blood but there is nothing more important for the country than to revive the democratic process in the time period given in the Constitution.

On two counts alone, any court in the world should find the former PM and her husband culpable of gross violation of the Constitution. It may also cost the odd couple a lot of friends. Benazir's extraordinary reaction in the NA to the Mar 20 SC judgment was broadcast a number of times by Rana Shaikh's TV, obnoxious and shameful harangue that poured contempt on the rule of law as well as the respected superior judiciary who have to interpret it.

die whenever he was around, first in Karachi and then in Lahore? What if he should start singing like a canary? He needs to explain a number of unexplained murders like that of STA Judge Justice the Landhi Jail Warden Abdul Rahim Shaikh, Takbeer's Salahuddin, Former Judge Nizam Siddiqui, etc ('Messages, Loud and Clear', The Nation June 20, 1996). All of them must have had different enemies, how come Asif Zardari was the only one common to all of them?

The other matter which is very open and shut is the wide-scale electronic eaves-dropping and wire-tapping to which anyone having any position to influence course of events, friend or foe, was subjected to, if anything friends and supporters of the odd couple should find it

embarrassing that they did not escape such invasion of their privacy guaranteed under the Constitution. Carried out by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) by Maj (Retd) Masood Sharif, a Petaro School class-mate and appointee of Asif Zardari, it is a well-known fact that he took his orders directly from him. This Masood Sharif relationship may also prove fatal on the major count of brother Muratza Bhutto's murder, ostensibly on the orders of Asif Zardari (AZ), as well as the subsequent clumsy cover-up attempt. And what about our friendly 'liquidator', Tariq Lodhi, why do bombs go off and people seem to

AS I SEE IT
Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

out such contempt and venom publicly, no sane person would have tried to further publicise the aberration. Was Ms Benazir of right mind when she displayed such shameless contempt? Was she lowering the level of her husband's exercise in running the country, if that tape is played in Court, the SC should suo-moto not only find her guilty of contempt of Court SC would be hard put to refer her to a Medical Board to ascertain her sanity. The symptoms she has been displaying publicly are alarming even by Hitlerian standards, 'those whom the Gods want to destroy, they first make them mad'.

support from very sound banking brains to do the money-laundering out of Pakistan. To escape the accountability process, some of the bankers have set wheels in motion so that their IOUs with their uniformed and bureaucratic contacts, serving and retired. We must employ foreign private investigation companies to trace down the money, real-estate, safe deposit boxes, etc., illegally held abroad. Depending upon the FIA, etc., will get us into a dead end, it will only mean that FIA personnel will personally get rich as they did when chasing down the illegal investment companies, financial co-operatives, etc. We need to go into overdrive into a no-holds barred modus operandi, too much is at stake for the poor people of this country for us to act squeamish in trying to recover ill-gotten wealth, after all the bankers are accessories to the financing of murder and terror. Not having as much to lose as their mentors, they would be more amenable to reason, applied judiciously. Having suffered in some great measure, our people are impatient for bringing the criminals to justice. No less is the mass anxiety and apprehension that unless the fabulous wealth acquired by these criminals is traced out and recovered, it will facilitate their return in attempting to bring to justice those who have violated the due process of law at will, should we also short-circuit the due process of law? Going the wrong route to correct another wrong will not be right, it will only compound the situation.

A 'Damage Control and Remedial Measures Cell' must explain to the population what is the Minimum Common Perception (MCP). While sound in his economic initiatives, Shahid Javed Burki made a major misstep by announcing closure of some DFIs, this caused a mini-run on those financial institutions. Moreover, people

need to get some relief in consumer prices, raising of fuel prices may bring in some revenues for government, it will touch off another inflation spiral. Given the pluses and minuses, however, two weeks after November 5, 1996, the people should ask themselves the following questions: 1) do they feel less apprehensive about their future as individuals and families than what they felt two weeks ago? 2) do they feel that the rapid economic decline has been arrested? 3) do they feel that the rule of law will prevail in their daily lives? and 4) do they feel as if an enormous burden has been lifted from their lives? If the answer is 'yes' to all the aforementioned questions then the Caretakers have succeeded in bringing some much-needed relief to the hard-pressed psyche of the people of Pakistan. The MCP by itself is not enough, the people of Pakistan need elections in 90 days, an election that will erase the aberration that the likes of 1993 Caretakers thrust on us. Will the 1993 Caretakers and their mentors be held accountable?

Despite the missteps and confusion, the Caretaker Government's scorecard at this stage is certainly better than the 'Average' mark, nowhere near the 'Above Average' level. They need to change some of their own appointees and implement the Accountability Bill in letter and spirit for the ratings to go higher than what the mass perception attributes to them presently. The people want their representatives rather than selected people to rule over them and that can only be achieved through the completion of the electoral process in the next 75 days. Despite her rhetoric, it is certainly not in the interest of Benazir that polls are held. How else can she achieve the two-fold purpose of undercutting the credibility of the President and the Caretaker Government while avoiding the censure that the people will certainly give her at the hustings? The electoral process must take precedence over everything else, on that will depend the final tally on the Caretaker scorecard.

Clinton Opens His Second Term with a Gusto

Clinton has emerged as a successful de facto world President, being the President of USA, the only superpower left in the world, to work as a "trouble-shooter". Does he look yonder? A M M Shahabuddin writes

His whole life is one long re-election campaign, declared a leading US political analyst, John Brummet, who is said to have followed Clinton's rise to the highest of his popularity, first as the Governor of his home-state Arkansas, then, on the national scene, as the President of America. It's a well-said and a well-timed compliment and a fitting tribute to Clinton. Undoubtedly, Clinton has set a new record in his onward political strides. During the last two decades of his political life, sometimes stormy, sometimes otherwise, beginning from his first governorship of Arkansas in 1976 till his triumphant entry into the White House for second term, Clinton has proved it thoroughly. His return to the Presidency for second-term is a colourful milestone on his splendid political rise. He is a miracle-boy and that is why at the age of 32, he was called a 'boy wonder' of American politics. He has created history by his successive re-election as Arkansas Governor for five consecutive two-year terms, then the second term as US President. Perhaps he would follow President Roosevelt who occupied the White House for consecutive four terms from 1932 to 1945, when he died suddenly.

Will He Repeat History Following Roosevelt? And in his recent re-election for second term, Clinton literally jumped over the 'Republican moon', landing safely in the

White House towards his second term. It was a great achievement on his part against the veteran and well-seasoned Republican rival Bob Dole, winning the race by about 50 per cent of the votes cast as against 42 per cent for Dole. Thus he created another history by getting himself as a Democrat President for second term after a gap of about half a century when the dominant Republicans ruled the roost, the last two being in the list — Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Surprisingly, only two years ago, Clinton was discounted by many as a 'one-term lame duck'. He was even written off by some of his own partymen as 'finished', meaning a spent force. But Clinton forcefully pricked all speculations about him, by turning the table in his favour. But will Clinton be able to repeat history, following his illustrious predecessor Roosevelt? Only time will show that. But the big possibility just can't be brushed aside as a day-dream.

Rowing Boat Vs Battleship What heavy odds Clinton had to face during his election campaign in 1992, when he had to encounter a gigantic challenge from a formidable Republican like George Bush who overnight turned a war-hero by raising the famous 'Desert Storm' against that 'Little

Hitler' of Iraq. As compared to that, Clinton was just a calm-water rowing boat dashing against a battleship, or a David against a Goliath! But surprisingly again, the American people was judicious enough to reject the glamorous Gulf-war hero, welcoming Clinton as their new President who once refused to go to Vietnam as a US Marine. Bush, during his election campaign, once said that it would 'prove devastating should Americans know the worst about Clinton — that he had attended Oxford as a Rhodes scholar and had visited Russia.' Poor Bush! He was dictated by the American people just as the Britons did with their once War-hero Winston Churchill. In fact, Clinton knows well 'how to make friends and influence people.' He is the most fantastic and successful communicator with his people. He is a master in this art. But he had to pay a heavy price to learn this hard lesson.

He Learns a Hard Lesson It is true Clinton opened his 'political' innings with a 'duck' in 1974, when he failed to reach the Congress as he lost it narrowly. But he was not a person to be disappointed. He was imbued with a high ambition. When he was just a student of Secondary School, Clinton visited the White House and shook

hand with the then President John F Kennedy — a handshake which perhaps electrified him with an unforgettable moment which later helped him put in the same White House as a Democrat President. In 1976, he was elected Attorney-General and after two years, in 1978, he was elected Governor of Arkansas for a two-year term. But when he went for the second term, in 1980, he got the shock of his life when he lost the election. To his utter dismay he discovered that he was disliked by the people for, what he called his 'unbecoming arrogance'. Arrogant, he was, and he had to pay a heavy price for it. He learnt a hard lesson.

On the eve of his next attempt for Governorship in 1982, he had to run commercials confessing his 'sin' and seeking apology for his 'arrogance'. The people being impressed, returned him again. Clinton openly declared: 'I learned that you can't lead without listening'. And he was elected, getting back the Governorship that he had lost in 1980. And he continued to maintain his winning spree till he was elected consistently for the fifth term in 1990. But one fine morning in 1991 he announced that he would be running for next President. Thus began the Bush-Clinton battle for the occupation of the White

House in 1992. The rest has become history to repeat itself in 1996 election for Presidentship. Clinton had learned where the shoe pinches and how to counter it.

Clinton's 'Economic Pills' Work

In the 1992 election, Clinton used a simple and clear-cut strategy with his programme for economic betterment of the general Americans with better living conditions, more jobs, better healthcare, and fight against unemployment and environment. The Americans had already gleefully swallowed the 'economic pills' that Clinton had offered. And he crossed the bridge, leaving Bush far behind. In the 1996 election for his second term, Clinton made a successful repeat performance with his earlier positive 'prescription' for bringing about a real 'change' in socio-economic life of the people. Practically, he had followed the 'track' shown by Roosevelt through his 'New Deal Revolution' that brought immense benefits to the so-called 'have-nots'.

Clinton proved that his economic policy would be more beneficial to the poor and ordinary people of America as against Reagan's, and later followed by Bush, the 'trickle down' economy that never reached the bottom line of the

US President — A De Facto World President

Clinton was elected in 1992 more as 'Domestic President', than an international leader, like Presidents, from Eisenhower, through Kennedy and Nixon and Reagan, down to Bush, who were elected more as world leaders. But Clinton proved his mettle within the shortest possible time. The Cold War period, bogged by 'communism' and 'evil empire' of the Soviet Union was not there. But there were still more vexed problems that began to haunt heavily on world peace and scrutiny. So he had to face what a western journalist called a 'nasty world'.

But Clinton made his mark in successfully tackling such problems that raised their ugly heads in Bosnia, the Middle East, Africa and other places. And he acted like a world leader when he successfully brought together some of the unravelling European leaders in his search for peace and harmony in Europe and elsewhere. Even he had to 'intervene' in England's 'domestic' Irish problem. Today he has emerged as a successful de facto world President, being the President of America, the only superpower left in the world, to work as a 'trouble-shooter'. So it would not be just a day-dream to foresee President Clinton stepping into the third terms and beyond.

To the Editor...

Congratulations USA

Sir, We congratulate not only President Bill Clinton of Democratic Party but we also congratulate Presidential candidates Bob Dole of Republican Party and Ross Perot of Reform Party, all senators, all members of the House of Representatives, all Republicans and Democrats and every citizen of the United States of America on the historic and monumental US Presidential election of November 5, 1996.

In every four years the people of America elect a new President or they extend the term of office of the incumbent President for another four years exercising their right to franchise without any fear, favour or ill-will towards anybody.

The great excellence and unique quality of the US Presidential election is that it is always held in a free and fair atmosphere without any terrorism, vendalism or vote-rigging. Whoever wins or loses the election the supporters of government and opposition parties always embrace, hug and greet each other with great enthusiasm, joy and merriment without any bitterness and enmity. Every American gets a fresh lease of life, feels blissful happiness and welcomes dawn of a new horizon to build a better future, better tomorrow with hope and aspiration, energy and stamina. The nation gets more and more stronger day by day and the country attains more and more honour and prestige all around the world.

Today the United States of America is the most developed, advanced and the mightiest

country in the world. It is the most successful democracy and also the most interesting civilization on earth.

The people of Asia, Africa and Latin America have much to learn and own from the polity and economy, science and technology, trade, commerce and industry of the USA.

Bangladesh's relation with the USA has always been very close and friendly. It does not matter whether we have a JP, Awami League or BNP government in our country or tie and bond of friendship with the human rights activists and democracy minded people of the USA have always been blissful and eternal. We are also confident that our relations with the US would continue to grow in the years to come.

The importance and the role of the USA in the international affairs need not be over-emphasised. It may, however, be mentioned here that many European, Asian, African and Latin American countries always look towards the US with great hope and expectation for the solution of their manifold socio-economic and problems of foreign affairs.

We would request the leadership of the USA to kindly to use its good office and influence to help solve problems like Palestine-Israeli dispute, exercise of right of self-determination for the people of Kashmir, equitable sharing of the Ganges water between Bangladesh and India, establishment of peace, security and political stability in Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire, withdrawal of the UN economic sanctions against Iraq, destruction of nuclear

weapons world-over and writing off the loans of the G-7 countries to the poor nations of Asia and Africa expeditiously and to save millions of people from further oppression, suppression and bloodshed.

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Agriculture education in HSC curriculum

Sir, It has been monitored that the authorities concerned are contemplating to drop 'Agriculture' from the HSC curriculum. It may be mentioned here that students have been studying and passing HSC from this group for the last 25 years. About 150 teachers having Bachelors degree in Agriculture have also been serving to teach agricultural subject of agriculture group students. Recently during the course of discussion on agricultural education system, Dr Md Motiur Rahman of the Training Division of DAE who had also been a member of 1995 Curriculum Renewal Committee opined that there is a positive relationship between increase of crop production with the rate of literate persons in agri-science.

In advanced countries, persons who are not qualified in agri-science are not allowed to cultivate even their own land or to run farming business. Bangladesh is an agriculture-based country. The economic emancipation of this country largely depends on its development in agriculture. And to bring development in our agri sector we need manpower quali-

fied in agri-science.

Hence we would strongly suggest the government to retain agri-science group in HSC and a full paper of 100 marks on agri-science as a subject at SSC level. This will not only create self-employment opportunities but also contribute significantly to the development of the country's agriculture.

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Stop hypocrisy with Noor Hossain's soul

Sir, Nine years have passed after the tragic killing of Noor Hossain. We have totally forgotten to perceive the meaning of the heroic and glorious sacrifice of Noor Hossain during the movement against the then autocratic government of HM Ershad. Much has been talked about him. But what actually did we pay to him? I am sure his departed soul is laughing towards the hypocrisy of our so-called politics. For which he has dedicated his life, that long-striving democracy is twinkling and witnessing the peaceful political understanding of the two former arch rivals.

I question the role of Awami League or its apparently gaining strategy which compelled it to make an alliance with Jatiya party (JP). What would Awami League be gaining? The answer is 'nothing'. Hence, due to this alliance with JP the soul of Noor Hossain may never forgive AL.

So, I request the AL not to indulge in any paradoxical role which might hamper its acceptability to the people. If it is not possible to understand the necessity and reality of the political alliance with JP then please stop to pay official tribute to Noor Hossain's soul. Otherwise, I think it would definitely undermine him.

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Card phones

Sir, The card phones are very popular among those who do not have phones at home, but have to ring up locally and overseas for various reasons. I understand that in Spain where the number of private phones are very few, the authorities have provided card phones in every neighbourhood for the benefit of those who do not have phone connection. Here in our country the card phones were introduced with fanfare and after initial pessimism, if were welcomed by everybody.

But now it appears that a number of these phones have become inoperative causing inconvenience to the beneficiaries (the users). One such location was the Eastern Tower Shopping Point at the Eastern Tower. There are two booths at this location which serve the needs of a large number of people from the Bangla Motor-Eskaton area because there are no other booth in the neighbourhood. I have been often using these booths, but quite for sometime these card phone booths were out of order.

Now I come to know from a letter of Mr Mobarak Karim that he found all the card phones at the GPO are out of order. Is there no one at the T&T to oversee the functioning and maintenance of these phones?

Is there any link with proliferation of illegal private phone and fax facilities all over the city and card phones remaining out of order? These facilities are not licensed by the T&T and they charge exorbitantly for local, NWD and overseas calls. In Calcutta I have seen many private but licensed phone booths all over the city. They have meters to show the charges and also issue a small print-out showing the date and time, called number, amount of charge for the calls and the identification of the booth. These booths are privately run under licence from the Indian Telephone Authority and must follow the conditions laid down in the licence. Why can't we have such a transparent system side by side with the popular card phone system?

It also takes the opportunity to request the authority concerned to initiate a countrywide investigation as to how many card phones have so far been installed in Dhaka city and the rest of the country, and how many are functioning. Also those that are not functioning, why? I was told by a high-up at the T&T that these card phones have been a tremendous success from revenue point of view. Because the revenue cards from these are instant and do not fall in arrears.

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