

Let This be the Beginning

After a long time the leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia has uttered something copiously laudable. As the guest of honour in the monthly luncheon meeting of the AmCham Saturday, the BNP chief categorically stated her party's unbelief in politics of confrontation. By spelling out thus, she has actually broken a new ground in the wasteland of our politics and we sincerely believe that this, irrespective of the vicissitudes in the life of parties or individuals, will be the lasting feature of our political culture. The former prime minister did a world of good to the credibility of her concern for the welfare of the people and the progress of the country when she reassured the elite assembly that her party would not resort to disruptive methods like calling strikes in order to pay the ruling party back in their own coin. With this one statement, Khaleda has truly come of age as the leader of the opposition party.

We hope the utterance of the BNP chairperson does not go a-begging as a unilateral and unadvised attempt for bringing qualitative improvement in our rancorous political culture. The ruling party will be well-advised to brush aside habitual cynicism and seize this gracious gesture for forging some unity in diversity to give its best shot to development. As the party in power the onus of building on this excellent opportunity of national harmony lies with Awami League. Instead of delving in inimical legacy and taking a casual look at this really novel BNP approach, AL should go the whole hog to make their political rivals live upto something they have committed publicly.

We would like to believe, what Khaleda said was not an utterance of convenience and an image-building one. It is not only the political culture that will have a touch of novelty if Khaleda sticks to what she said Saturday but her image as a believer in politics of commitment would be few notches brighter.

Stop Them

The Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami, on Saturday went on a rampage for the umpteenth time at their pet pasture — the Rajshahi University. Nothing — in cruelty and inhumanity — is beyond the capacity of these armed young goons. That's a lesson they have been giving us from before the Liberation War. And till today we have not possibly quite learnt it. Times were when government, or plainly police could not go after their wanton commission of violent crime as parties and persons in power were in a kind of collusion with the Jamaat. Society has long been deprived of enforcement of law and justice in matters involving Shibir crimes.

The Shibir does not like the new admission system that has taken effect this week. Their way of sabotaging it is by force. They begin by foisting a three-day strike on the university so that no one can take admission forms. To make this certain they raid a bank, attack the police posse, rummage through university offices, get into the VC's and teachers' residences and subject these to medieval rampage.

The Shibir has been allowed to be the bullies they have ever been. They must be stopped now. One thought the Jamaat would be persuaded by the futility of their university-busting successes at Chittagong and Rajshahi to give up this line of strategy. They could try some new tack. But it is now evident they don't have a wide choice. A fascist party can thrive only through its fascistic ways. Forces of crime must now be opposed by forces of law and justice and reason. If the government as well as the students and teachers and others affected by the Shibir's evil ways fail in this resistance, dear will be the price exacted in terms of social stagnation and resulting poverty and hunger and inhumanity.

To the government we say crush the criminals at RU. The whole nation will be behind you. You will gain much in credibility and trust. If you fail, you will forfeit people's confidence in you by a great measure. And the Shibir or social villainy will gain by the same measure. To your peril. To our peril.

Fish an Unfailing Promise

A very plausible answer to the question what makes Bangladesh tick is, however, at the same time very persuasive. It is the performance of the agricultural sector that mainly makes us live. The food miracle has its bad patch. It is short on protein. Our livestock situation is unenviable. And our ever dwindling fish resources are in a horribly pitiable shape. How to raise our animal protein production to match our cereal output? Hardly any nation has till now increased livestock population radically. It has taken all history and endless horizons of pastureland to enable Denmark or Argentina or Australia — the dairy and meat and wool countries — to become what they are. Livestock is a terribly slow growing matter.

Which fish wealth is not. Fortunately for us — the traditional fish-eaters. Unfortunately for us, notorious fish-eaters as we are, we have been proving very prodigal in our ways about this delight of the Bengali life, over the past five or six decades. Our fish-stocks, grounds and generation have come to such a low that only the rich now can hope to have a fish dinner once in a while. As the fish, all fish, lay tens of thousands of eggs each female and as a fair share of them can be helped to grow into full-size fish by only a congenial environment, the fish decline can be stopped and even reversed with a determined national endeavour, dovetailed to a national fish policy.

We are gratified that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked for exactly the same. Fish culture is agriculture intensified by a factor of may be more than ten. We shall be fools not to grow and consume more and more fish in a matter of less than a decade.

OVER the past few weeks Israel has been rocked by corruption scandal involving Binyamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister. The Attorney General in his televised report, carried live both by BBC and CNN, spared Netanyahu the indictment but damaged him sufficiently so that his authority appears gravely compromised.

There was a police report that stated that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was involved in influence peddling in the proposed appointment of an Attorney. A thorough investigation was conducted by the Attorney General's office and an eight page report was presented. The Attorney General in his summary spared Netanyahu the indictment but pronounced words to the effect that a cloud of suspicion of wrongdoing hung heavily over the head of the Israeli Prime Minister.

There is no love lost between the Prime Minister and the Israeli media. In fact the media had pronounced the Prime Minister 'guilty'. Passions rose to great heights and the interest of the public was so great that they avidly followed the TV telecast like a popular soap opera. We have decided to close the file for lack of evidence. The Attorney General's office, the Elia-

Israel: Netanyahu's Crisis

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General. Prime Minister Netanyahu in his immediate post report televised statement said that the nation should leave the topic of his indictment along with his associates principally the Home Minister, behind. Yet there does not appear any possibility that the issue of indictment on charges of corruption will go away. The leader of the opposition Shimon Peres has called upon Netanyahu to resign and call for fresh elections. There is no possibility that Netanyahu will heed this call.

Inevitably Israel will plunge into acrimony and it may lead to turmoil. For if Likud has been spared, its powerful ally Shaas religious party leader Ariel Deri is to face further questioning and will most likely be indicted. Shaas with its 10 seats in the Parliament brings the essential support to prop up the Coalition. The pressure is mounting on Shaas to quit the Coalition and take the country to fresh elections.

So much cloud of suspicion has been created over this affair

which the Israeli media has dubbed 'Bibigate' that the only way out seems to be general election sooner rather than later. Horse trading between the Coalition partners may help tide over the present crisis but only for a short while. The report of the Attorney General has cleared Netanyahu from indictment but has left the

whole question of his integrity and reliability hanging in the balance. Netanyahu in his televised address has admitted to having committed 'mistakes' but not wrongdoing.

The events in Israel have been avidly watched throughout the world but nowhere as keenly as in the Arab world. The Arabs have progressively reached the sad conclusion that they cannot do business with Binyamin Netanyahu. They were hoping for the indictment of Netanyahu, which would just about finish him off politically. Since the first Palestinian-Israeli meeting in Madrid followed by secret, intense negotiations in Oslo leading to the historic handshake between Palestinian Chairman Arafat

and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin on the laws of the White House, Arab-Israeli relations have moved at break neck speed. Successive Israeli Government's have not deviated from the Peace Process initiated, nurtured and carried forward by the USA. The first jolt was administered by Binyamin Netanyahu and his Likud party.

One after the other roadblocks were erected by Netanyahu to the point that the Peace Process itself seemed in jeopardy. The most dangerous step taken by Netanyahu has been the decision to build settlements in East Jerusalem. In one quick blow he just about buried the Peace Process. For long Israel has claimed united Jerusalem as the 'eternal capital' of Israel. Palestine also claims and very justifiably, Jerusalem as her capital.

Jerusalem is the meeting ground of the three largest monotheistic faiths—namely, Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

During the long negotiations the framework that was created in Oslo by the authors of the Accord had very wisely left Jerusalem for future negotiations. For Jerusalem raises passions like few other topics do. By trying to grab the entire Jerusalem Netanyahu was paying scant attention to the Peace Process nor was he paying any heed to the passions that were going to be roused. In-

deed he was reversing the entire foreign policy of his predecessors including Menachem Begin, the Likud Prime Minister, who had signed the Peace Accord with Egypt, thus paving the way to Peace Accords with other Arabs. The Peace Accord between Palestine and Israel, is a landmark and no amount of trickery by Netanyahu will be able to reverse the achievements of last several years. Indeed the Peace Process has been immeasurably strengthened by the Accord between Jordan and Israel. By his dangerous act of establishing settlements in East Jerusalem Netanyahu appears ready to throw away the gains of last five years.

In the meantime what is going on in the White House? After all they are the sole Superpower and if anybody has any leverage on Israel it is the US Government, if only due to the 3 billion Dollar plus aid pouring into Israel from Washington. The US has staked time, money and most important prestige in bringing about a solution to the Middle East conflict.

As Israel wrestles with her internal problem and decides the fate of Binyamin Netanyahu, the Peace Process must necessarily be on hold, although it is a cruel waste of time.

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman



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Non-implementation of Water-sharing Accord Sparks off Dissent

by Asadullah Khan

Since the provisions of the treaty have not been implemented right from the beginning nor any tangible explanation offered by the Indian side when Bangladesh side raised the issue with their Indian counterpart, people in the country have become apprehensive about the Indian mood and motive.

FOR a party that rode to power with popular mandate, basking in its electoral success after ten months is suddenly getting marginalised. Despite its extensive grassroots network, the party seems to have lost touch with the issues that plague people's lives for more than a decade. Worse, if failed to capitalise on the disenchantment of the masses with the previous government of BNP.

Following the stunning reversal that the party (AL) now faced recently though the High Court verdict in the detention of four BNP leaders by special powers act, it can hardly take comfort in the fact that the party hierarchy is guided by pragmatism, discretion and liberal ideas. As Mr Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star in his commentary on 9th April, has termed this judgement as a wake up call for the party, one feels that the judgment is more a moral defeat than a legal defeat. None will dispute the fact that the power cable tower collapse in Ishurdi was anything but a sabotage because no severe cyclonic storm blew over that part of the country at that time which might have raged the tower to the ground. But the implication of four BNP leaders and detention in absence of clear proof of their involvement could hardly be substantiated and the action taken against them seems to be ill-conceived, unmotivated and mala fide and has been set aside by the country's highest court bringing the party and the government to suffer humiliation beyond measure. Peoples are only intrigued to find that saboteurs that were there could not be hauled up by the government agencies concerned because of the inept follow-up of the subversion played up by the quarters really involved. For the ruling party, it could not have been a worse stance to rein in the opposition before a half-day hartal call on the basis of reports that could not be substantiated when it became so necessary.

All indications were there that the Prime Minister had a clear vision and was making inroads to weed out corruption and bureaucratic tangles that interfered with the development of the country in many sectors like encountering power shortage, gas pipeline laying, foreign investment and improvement in the education sector. But her dynamism hardly matched with that of the bureaucratic set up that were prone to pursue a dilly-dallying policy. Corruption cases of the past regimes, shocking irregularities in allocation and disbursement of state funds and favouritism that riddled different sectors of the government could hardly be pursued with the boldness and vigour that it demanded.

The country now faces a myriad of problems: power shortage, share market scam that completely ruined the small investors, non-implementation of the water sharing treaty by the Indian side that has sparked sharp protest from all categories of people in the country. Even Jyoti Basu, West Bengal Chief Minister feels genuinely perturbed after learning that Bangladesh was not getting her due share and he has instructed his minister for water resources in West Bengal to deal with the Bangladesh's grievances. Member, JRC from the Bangladesh side Professor Ainun Nishat has rightly pointed out that if the Indian side would take measures to protect the water flow there would be no shortfall and if the withdrawal of water at the upstream could be regulated by the Indian authorities it will be possible to ensure the required quantity of water at the Farakka point. Sensible citizenry in the country still feel that hopes that were kindled in the region through signing of a 30-year treaty on the sharing of the Ganges water for a solution to the long standing problem should not be allowed to be lost through manipulations by the vested interest. People in

the country now wait to see how the new government in India headed by Inder Kumar Gujral, at whose initiative, among others, the accord was signed, takes up the issue.

However, the administration in the country missed some of its obligations to the nation. Politically sensitive as the issue is, the administration should have let people know that the country was not getting its due share of water. In the last ten days of February, 39,106 cusec of water should have been available at the Harding Bridge point. But Bangladesh got 27,906 cusec on 22nd February, 23,094 cusec on 23rd Feb, 22,295 cusec on 24 Feb, 25,654 cusec on 25th Feb, 23,066 cusec on 26th Feb, and 24,559 cusec on 27th Feb and on March 27, the flow was the lowest in recent times, recording 6,457 cusec. Article 3 of the treaty stipulated that the moment water flow at the Farakka point came below 50,000 cusec, both the countries would immediately sit into a consultative meeting for reallocation of the quantum of water to be shared by the two countries. The flow recorded during the whole month of March, 1997 as provided by the Department of Hydrology, WDB is given in a tabular form (Table I). Table 2 shows the availability of water vis-a-vis the quantity that should have been available as per accord signed on Dec 12, 1996.

Shockingly, the world could know about the faltering flow, much below 50,000 cusec through BBC news broadcast that quoted Amal Kumar, Irrigation secretary, to the Government of West Bengal in India. Understandably, the immediate consultative meeting between the two countries could not be held in the wake of the political seesaw in the Indian

capital. Reports pouring in from Rajshahi indicate that the fall in the water level in Padma has caused drying up of its tributaries affecting irrigation, fishery and industrial units in this region. Noticeably, damage to irrigation is most potent since the IRRI-Boro cultivation of paddy need water most during this time of the year. Reports from Rajshahi, Chapai Nawabganj, Pabna, Goalundo, Kushtia and Rajbari indicate that most of the hand pumps in this region have become inoperative triggering another bleak crop prospect in the country. Even the operation of shallow and deep tube-wells have been threatened because of the decline in the ground water level. Things came to such a pass that the operation of the Ganges-Kabodak project which was switched on March 9 last after a long break came to a grinding halt because of insufficient water that was well below 5 metre depth required for its continuous operation. Sand dunes and shoals, most visible near the Harding Bridge point, have appeared over the large bed of the Padma.

Since the provisions of the treaty have not been implemented right from the beginning nor any tangible explanation offered by the Indian side when Bangladesh side raised the issue with their Indian counterpart, people in the country have become apprehensive about the Indian mood and motive. People have got to be lived and they are increasingly directing their ire at the poor performance of the government. It is worth recalling that since 1974, Bangladesh and India have been at loggerheads on many issues, water sharing issue being the most contentious of these. With the recent changes in governments in both Bangladesh and India, people

were thinking to make a new beginning. The favourable stance taken by both governments created a congenial atmosphere. It is time that this is realised and measures taken so that out time, energy, resources and opportunities are diverted to much-needed developmental programmes. Only then can the two nations which have much in common, hope to usher in peace, progress and prosperity.

Coming back to the contentious issue of faltering flow of water in the Bangladesh side, in absence of any guarantee clause, delay in going into an immediate consultative meeting when the quantum of water falls below 50,000 cusec at Farakka point and the consequential damage caused to agriculture and industry here one wonders how the interest of Bangladesh can be safeguarded, especially when bureaucratic tangles, intransigence and withdrawal at the upstream of Farakka to meet the needs of Haryana, Punjab, UP Delhi-Metropolitan area, Bihar and West Bangla continues unabated.

Happily, Bangladesh has maintained a very bold stance about getting its due share as per provisions of the accord. It has been stressed by the Bangladesh side that as per study of the water flow record available during the last 48 years, quantum of flow at Farakka point never reached below 60,000 cusec in April. As per accord signed on 12th December between Sheikh Hasina and Deve Gowda, Prime

Ministers of Bangladesh and India respectively, Bangladesh was to receive 35,000 cusec and India 28,000 cusec during the last part of April. The sudden disclosure by the minister of water resources, West Bengal asking for a revision of the accord when even a grain of it has not been implemented has come as a rude shock to the people of Bangladesh. People in this country would not like to see the issue getting messier again that has for long poisoned the relations between the neighbouring countries. It is not unlikely that the present opposition party in the Parliament would make it a viable issue for movement in the country. That would only mean denying an opportunity of improving relations between the two countries so assiduously built after years of missed opportunities.

Table-1

Date	Flow (cusec)
01.03.97	24,217
02.03.97	25,209
03.03.97	25,448
04.03.97	24,945
05.03.97	22,771
06.03.97	18,750
07.03.97	21,767
08.03.97	23,462
09.03.97	26,259
10.03.97	23,943
11.03.97	19,533
12.03.97	20,467
13.03.97	14,920
14.03.97	18,317
15.03.97	16,335
16.03.97	28,561
17.03.97	20,394
18.03.97	20,394
19.03.97	15,088
20.03.97	15,300
21.03.97	14,256
22.03.97	-
23.03.97	6,457
24.03.97	-
25.03.97	9,313
26.03.97	-
27.03.97	-
28.03.97	-
29.03.97	-
30.03.97	-
31.03.97	-

Flow during the March, 1997

Table-2

March	Availability in 1997 (Cusec)	Water Accord signed in 1996 (cusec)
1-10	21,000	35,000
11-20	21,000	29,688
21-30	6,457	29,688
31	9,313	29,688

To the Editor...

Frisivolous?

Sir, You published a photograph (in 8th April's issue) of Minister Razzak at the opening ceremony of a new branch of IFC Bank. Alongside of him was the cheerful ASF Rahman fresh from a court appearance following his successful bail petition. Is it really meet for a senior government minister to be publicly sponsoring a person accused of embezzling the widow's mite in the recent widely publicised share scandal? Everyone has the right to be deemed innocent until proven guilty but has everyone the right to have ministers signalling the world that his government's case is frivolous?

II

Sir After the slap-in-the-face High Court decision concerning the four 4 BNP leaders should the Attorney-General not muster the grace to resign?

Harun Azim
Banani, Dhaka.

Congratulations to Bangladesh cricketers

Sir, I am very happy that Bangladesh cricket team has won the ICC Trophy. The whole cricket world is very happy that our cricketers have placed themselves brilliantly for the 1999 World Cup due in England. After more than 25 years, Bangladeshi boys have won such an international victory. I fail to express my real feelings at this development and thank the cricketers, their coach, the manager and, of course, the Bangladesh Cricket Board for

their respective contributions towards the victory. I pray to Allah that Bangladesh team emerges as a very formidable contender in the World Cup 1999. The target, of course, must be to win the World Cup itself.

I highly appreciate the gesture of the Prime Minister when she herself received the cricket team at the airport. Our cricketers must take it not only as a great honour but also as an encouragement to go ahead in their victorious journey towards World Cup 1999.

Adib Reza
Parbagh House
Dhaka-1000

Bird sanctuary

Sir, It was a great consolation for us — nature lovers — to know that the government has decided to declare some large man-made, artificial waterbodies as bird sanctuaries. I would like to point out some of my concerns regarding this. Firstly, these waterbodies are under too much pressure to meet the various human needs and are continuously under threat and disturbance. Secondly, the birds not only prefer secured areas for roosting but also a suitable habitat where they can find ample food to thrive on and breed. Thirdly, and most importantly, we often forget the role they play and the niche they occupy in the ecosystem. Just providing an over-exploited, constantly disturbed waterbody is not enough for the waterfowl and other wetland-dependent birds. The habitat and the overall environment needs to be improved too. The declaration of bird sanctuaries is definitely a good move and it

will also serve as a blessing for the resident waterfowl, which are deprived of feeding and breeding areas elsewhere, due to massive loss of wetlands all over the country.

The Ministry of Land (MoL) has acted in a very generous way, long after the promulgation of the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act 1974. We welcome the government's decision and extend our felicitations to the MoL. The Forest Department under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment and Forest — as national caretakers of the wildlife, other biological resources and protected areas, had been trying for long to establish wetland sanctuaries with the prime intention to conserve waterfowl, both migratory and resident. Every time due to lack of cooperation from either MoL or Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL) it did not materialize. The reasons are very simple. The wetlands are khas lands (government lands) and are controlled by the MoL and, on some occasions, the right of control is with the Department of Fisheries under MoFL. Who wants to easily give the control rights to others?

The recent move by the MoL seems to be tricky one. By declaring the *dighis*, etc, as bird sanctuaries the MoL is trying to create a smoke-screen diverting the attention of MoEF and general people who are concerned with biodiversity conservation. There are several important wetlands which have been identified and fulfil several Ramsar criteria and deserve to be on the protected list of wetland sites and also as Ramsar sites. Bangladesh is a signatory to both the Ramsar Convention

and Biodiversity Convention. Those important wetlands are under the control of MoL and used for revenue generating activities. The MoEF is currently involved in the preparation of a management plan for one of those sites, Tanguar Haor, under National Conservation Strategy (NCS), but it has no legal authority on the wetland. The MoEF should initiate a dialogue with MoL and other related ministries/agencies for ensuring the proper management of these wetlands with particular emphasis on biodiversity conservation.

Farhana Zarf
Carinam,
70 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000

SAQG and SAARC

Sir, Now the baby has been named. It is SAQG (South Asia Growth Quad), according to news from the Kathmandu meet, where the Asian Development Bank also made its presence felt.

Perhaps the baptism was blessed by godfather Uncle Sam, through WB/ADB feasibility studies. Has India lost control with the Sub-regional manipulation? In any case, the US would not have allowed Indian control in this strategic Bay Delta zone.

hence a clear political stand would be welcome, to dampen hopes and fear, as the case may be.

With one stroke, the political configuration of the Bay of Bengal delta region has changed dramatically. If America is interested, it may be difficult to change the course of future history.

What else is there on the menu?

A Husnain
Dhaka

No more environmental pollution, please!

Sir, On the occasion of the holy Eid-ul-Azha which has recently been celebrated, some acts of carelessness and dirty habits have caused public concern about environmental pollution and I like to bring to your kind notice that this is high time we should have taken initiatives against such menace. Ours is a Muslim country and on this auspicious occasion, a large number of cattle are slaughtered in the name of Allah in commemoration of the unprecedented sacrifice of Hazrat Ibrahim (Alai-h-o-salam) as a religious sacrament. After slaughtering these animals, the exterior of the animals such as hide, hooves, hair etc and sometimes intestinal tracts are left on the ground where they were slaughtered. Again, blood and excreta left by these cattle make the environment dirty and filthy. In consequence, heaps of filthy matters and garbage are left here and

there on the streets, lanes and bi-lanes to vitiate the whole atmosphere. The bad smell coming out of these heaps is undoubtedly harmful to our health. If this insanitary state is allowed to continue, our lives will be miserable and we shall inevitably fall victims to serious diseases. The sweepers of the municipality seem to have been neglecting their duties. It is a pity that road inspectors of the Municipal Corporation have taken no notice of these unwanted things. I, therefore, draw the attention of the Municipal authorities, through your esteemed daily, to the calamitous state of some of the roads, streets, lanes and bi-lanes of the city during this occasion. They should arrange for the removal of the garbage heaped on the ground just after slaughtering of sacrificial cattle.

It may be pointed out that germs of diseases mixed with dust are scattered away by gusts of wind and are likely to cause infection to also those away from proximity. This pollution can be stopped by means of heavy watering and by using disinfectants if possible immediately after the slaughtering of the animals.

I confidently hope that the Municipal authorities as well as the citizens of the country specially the city dwellers should be aware of the serious consequences of the uncleared garbage from those slaughtered cattle. And, above all, dirty habits of the people must have to be rectified through social motivation and health education.

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