The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka Monday, March 16, 1998

Light at the Tunnel's End?

The BJP is apparently back on course to be forming the new government in India. Not quite with a bang though, the numerical constraint being only technically circumvented rather than conclusively overcome. Jayalalitha's AIADMK and her allies having a weightage of 27 seats in the Lok Sabha, after a bargaining detour made up their mind on Saturday to extend "unconditional support" to a BJP led government.

They conveyed such an assurance in writing to President K R Narayanan who has been insisting upon committed support from smaller groups to avert any sudden demise of government. The fickle-minded withdrawal of the so-called support from outside had unmade quite a few minority governments in India. With that India's entry into the coalition era albeit turned inauspicious one time too many.

However, even with Jayalalitha's crucial support, the BJP-led coalition is not poised to be within a striking range of power. That's why there has to be Andhra Pradesh leader Chandrababu Naidu's Telegu Desham Party planning to abstain from a vote of confidence so that the BJP could claim it has got the support of a majority of those who were present and voted.

In such a scenario the BJP-led coalition will be a fragile government. That being the case, the Congress and the UF may be just waiting in the wings to try and clamber to power. The only saving grace for likely BJP-led government seems to be that the TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu who is the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has a rival in the Congress at the state level. So, his party cannot so easily switch over to a Congress-led formation at the centre without losing ground in state poli-

Even so, the tenuous nature of a BJP-led coalition is a built-in feature that cannot be simply wished away. So, the Congress is apparently keeping its hopes to lead a future coalition with the UF alive. From this point of view it is a significant development that the Congress Working Committee has named Sonia Gandhi as the party's president in place of octogenarian Kesri. With Sonia campaigning in the recent elections Congress Party secured 141 seats improving the tally only marginally from 138 seats in the 1996 polls. Congress would have perhaps done worse without her hitting the campaign trail. The UF has lost a lot of ground but the secular forces including the Congress have polled 54 per cent of the votes as compared with BJP's 34 per cent.

The electorate produced a hung parliament but hardly envisioned that the smaller regional parties would be so much of a key player in the formation of a government. Indian democracy is in for a litmus test.

Shabby OPDs

The purpose of a hospital is largely defeated if its Outpatient Department is mismanaged. The patients in need of referral healthcare are always greater in number than those taken into the various wards of a hospital. The OPDs in government hospitals are there to show how little has been done in all these years just even to do the minimum basics like taking stock of the logistic situation in view of a rapidly growing population and rapid advancement in medical science. Corruption of a section of the hospital staff, lack of accountability, authorities' insensitivity and indifference have all combined to play a havoc with healthcare service.

Time and again the print media has delved deep into the problems besetting the public health sector but to no avail. Quite in line with the concern expressed in the media the health ministry has of late given the impression of being in a swim of activism but not much has been reflected in reality.

A report in yesterday's Daily Star poignantly indicated how the ESP (Essential Package of Service) under the Fifth Health and Population Programme eluded OPD as an area of darkness. Reportedly there were no recommendations on how to improve the deplorable conditions of OPDs. From that point of view the outcome of the meeting of directors of different government hospitals bears some significance for us. The doctors' interaction resulted in some practical suggestions which if paid heed to will leave some impact on the standard of service at the OPD. There should be more such meetings of thinktanks in and outside the government.

No Relief

There may be doubts whether 81 criminals in every 100,000 of the population is a revelation but there is no doubt that crimes related to sexual assault on women have increased manifold. According to a disclosure from the Police department the track-record of criminal incidences does not feature any alarming rise in crimes like murder, robbery, dacoity etc. Nonetheless, the rate of increase in crimes which stood at 4.5 in 1993 jumped to 41.57 in 1997. The dreadful proliferation of sexual repression on women almost singly accounts for the graphic rise in crimes. So what little relief the law enforcers might feel in the rather stagnant pattern of the more traditional crimes goes out of the window. To think that a number of incidents of repression on women have been committed by the members of the police can only sharpen the edge of a disconcerting reality.

The success of a healthy society lies in its ability to outweigh the proportion of criminality with good sense, tolerance, reason and enlightenment. The general rise in the crime rate and the spate in gender violence as a major contributor to the phenomenon underline the fact that as a nation we have possibly arrived at that critical juncture where we all need to pause a little bit from the rat race of materialism and take a good look at the direction we are heading. The need to co-ordinate and interact at different professional and societal levels is probably higher than any time before.

The Quest for a Credible Political Leadership

HE emergence of Bangladesh was both preceded and followed by a series of extraordinary circumstances — protracted civil unrest, the worst cyclone of the history, the first ever general election, non-cooperation, genocide, war, famine and finally the violent overthrow of the first elected government culminating in the assassination of the nation's founding father — all of which dearly cost this already impoverished country in more than one way. Perhaps one of the most serious casualties of some of these traumatic events had been the near-total decimation of the country's credible political leadership. Prior to independence.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the last of the vanishing breed of national liberation leaders. successfully led his people to their cherished goal of freedom but both his towering personality and the prevailing political flux did not allow the growth of an alternative leadership. It was manifest from the events that followed. In the wake of Awami League's phenomenal popularity after 1969 mass upsurge when it occupied the country's entire political space, the most of the party's new entrants simply rode the bandwagon without much conviction. So when during 1971 they were put through the litmus test of their loyalty to the party and its ideology they miserably failed. The remaining lot including the party veterans gave a poor account of themselves in the aftermath of 1975 putsch. The leadership crisis deepened when four front-ranking AL leaders were killed under detention in November 1975, although few believed that anyone of them could really put on the mantle of their mentor. Nevertheless, 1975 was the end of an era — a watershed for the evolution of political leader-

ESPITE many contradic-

tions and opposition from

vested quarters, the

The demagogy, political gimmicry or sloganmongering are now motorway to nowhere. On the contrary, it is the managerial skill, dynamism and an X-ray vision with ability of seeing through the fog of time which would enable a leader to steer his nation through the turbulence of globalised politics.

ship in this country. Now came a different brand of political leaders who strutted on the centre stage of our politics for next two decades. After the political process of the country was brought under the official control by the succeeding regimes, an entirely different political culture evolved in

the country. Politics, it was told by the new ruler of the country. would henceforth be made difficult. But for a new brand of politicians it was rather simplified while the political veterans found it outright impossible to survive in an emerging political ethos : politics of thriving on politics. The new breed did not require to climb up the slippery slope of long political career to reach certain heights. He could be comfortably catapulted there in the least possible time if he was not wanting in his servility to the new ruler. In fact, now everything was given on the platter at a paltry price : a fealty to the

ical support base. It was not surprising that the culture rapidly flourished over the years. The political ambit was instantaneously crowded by the people that included obscure activists from far left and extreme right as well as fire brand revolutionaries to octogenarian obscurantists and shrewd opportunists. Notwithstanding the divergence of their background they had one striking similarity with all of their eyes fixed on an evershrinking national cake and greedy fingers stuck in its creamy layer. Not only that they ensured a share in the cake and continued to thrive even if the country went into a deep decline. The

nation's liability soared

master, direly in need of a polit-

their number also grew at the same time - particularly during the regime of Ershad who had a habit of changing his ministers almost at the frequency of changing his trousers.

Their regal life style of unbridled hedonism remained unaffected although the conditions of the bulk of the population worsened according to all available socio-economic indicators. They could not care less if the education of the country had been in ruins and health

its causes which were matters more of passions and conviction of an idealist. They had to climb up, with toils and tears, the steep ladder of leadership in public life. A few indeed treaded this difficult tract and fewer succeeded. Many failed and went into oblivion without stepping at the threshold of power. But then there had been in itself a great sense of fulfilment. Can't that traditional

politics be revived? Our public pinned great hope

and idealistic orientation of



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

services in chaos as long as their wards could be schooled abroad and their health was taken care of in Bangkok or Singapore. The law and order of the country crumbled but their high connections ensured them their immunity. Their mealymouthed mendacity carried them through the rough weather of politics. They refused to make their life difficult with firm conviction in politics and found expediency to be the golden rule to benefit from the ruling regimes of all hues.

Yet even in our country the politics was once considered a noble pursuit imbued with the spirit of service. In olden days the politics used to be a patriot's sacred commitment for the people in a polity. And the politicians paid high prices for

in the return of AL to power after long twenty-one years that the party with its credentials of principled politics of pre-independence days would bring back order in highly distorted political practices. It is however distressing to see that in addition to being oddly archaic in outlook the ruling style of a new breed 'Awamis' is hardly dissimilar from that of BNP or JP thus obliterating AL's ideological distance, if any, from its opponents. Its failure in addressing the nation's hard issues the law and order, campus unrests, corruption, poverty, public health and so on - is same as those of its predecessors. If the BNP or JP used public money to strengthen their political base the AL also uses the ministerial offices to lure away the opposition law makers in

the name of so called consensus government. So far the AL has not done anything to prove that it has an edge over others either in morality or capability. On the contrary it has failed to project an articulate enlightened political leadership as expected. Where do we go from here?

The last twenty-seven years

witnessed many changes both at global level as well as in our domestic scene. For years we blamed - and rightly - the authoritarianism to be at the root of all evils in our country. We have done away with it by installing democratically elected governments. We also thought of parliamentary system o government to be more conducive to participatory democracy. We now have got it. We held centrally controlled economy responsible for our economic stagnation. We have now opened up to the market forces. Amidst all these changes what has not changed is, however, the fate of our people. The changes in system is important, but much more important are the people who make the changed system work. Where do we get those people from?

An intellectual decay notwithstanding, this country, it is told has outstanding economists, jurists of international fame, scholars who teach abroad and innovative bankers. Bangladeshi builders produced architectural marvels outside the country. There are brave entrepreneurs when the working ambiance is free of sleaze. These professionals used to have some presence in our public life. They have gradually been pushed out of political arena with its growing criminalisation after the independence. There are courageous

leaders at various tiers enjoying tremendous mass appeal. In the ranks of political parties there are still muted few who genuinely mean well-being of the people and tenaciously guard their integrity. An emerging generation wedded to technology, vibrant with ideas and exposed to the revealing world of cyberspace earnestly looks for a role in the nation building. The country can also count on the blessings of innocent millions content only with two square meals, but ready to give everything when it comes to the question of the country. A measure of conviction still prevails among the cross section of political activists. Given the will and determi-

nation a potential leader can

always build on these assets. After all why can't the honesty be combined with quality, populism with knowledge, enthusiasm with initiative and conviction with capability? Or can't a bit of all of these positive values be encapsulised in a few at the apex of our politics? The political leadership has a great deal to do with the context of time and it must be responsive to its challenges. For the leadership in the developing countries, today's role models are Lee Kuanyew, Mahathir Mohammad and Deng Xiao-ping and not Nkrumah or Soekarno although all of them have been great leaders in the context to their time. The demagogy, political gimmicry or sloganmongering are now motorway to nowhere. On the contrary, it is the managerial skill, dynamism and an X-ray vision with ability of seeing through the fog of time which would enable a leader to steer his nation through the turbulence of globalised politics. For him the bottom line is absolute honesty and an average capability; anything more than that should be considered a bonus.

Parameters of the National Census

Why is the census necessary? To start with, unless the leaders of the country know exactly what the population is and how they are located and/or dispersed around the country, how can they manage the nation, what to talk about taking socio-economic initiatives and the planning of development activity?

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national census, due since 1991, has finally taken place. While the government vacillated till economic initiatives and the the last minute due to pressure planning of development activfrom various quarters, psychoity? Further in this age of inselogically this is a giant step for curity, it is very necessary to Pakistan. Lack of a population have correct documentation of count gave an impression of a the inhabitants of dwellings in free-for-all wild west-type sociorder to deny terrorists safe ety that was gradually becomhouses. Whether one is planing unmanageable in the Somaning anything in the health. lia-Rwanda sense. education, telecommunica-Traditionally a crossroads tions, transportation, welfare for humanity in the region, sectors, etc., without actual data Pakistan's fertile land and econothing is possible because at nomic potential has become a best planning is made on rough haven for migrants, not the estimates. Not the least is the least being the Muslims of Infactor of revenue collection, at dia, who battered by years of the moment less than 1 per cent brutality at worst and benign of the population is paying dineglect at best, have been

rect taxes, once enumerated, the streaming to Pakistan in more tax-paying population will inor less a constant flow. Because crease manifold. of the Afghan war and its long duration, most of the Afghans who came as refugees have now become Pakistanis by virtue of corrupt documentation. The National Identity Card (NIC) which was supposed to deter migrants has become the easiest thing to acquire, a Pakistani passport follows even more easily. The net result is that migrants are mostly registered as Pakistanis and locals, on the other hand, may or may not be registered at all. This has led to lop-sided documentation having no basis to actual reality. Why is the census necessary? To start with, unless the leaders of the last population count. of the country know exactly they form the majority of parwhat the population is and how liamentarians who legislate

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi society will go with it as the inordinate influence they command over the law enforcing agencies diminish.

Over the past 50 years, the rural majority has been transformed into an urban majority. this fact has to be reflected in democracy and governance thereof. At the present time, the rule of the minority over the majority is a travesty of both democracy and justice. Who does not want census? To start with a majority of our presentday politicians, particularly from the rural area, do not want a population count. The reason is not difficult to discern, they lose their majority status and the percs of authority that goes with it. At the moment by virtue

Similarly, given the ethnic composition of our nation the present ruling elite in at least two of the provinces, Balochistan and Sindh, do not want it as they feel that the ethnic Baloch and Sindhi respectively, will become minorities in their own provinces. Constant change has historical basis and one cannot

turn a blind eye to the evolution of nature. The people who should pay taxes but don't may be deeply affected by the census operation because having been documented they will be much more easily drawn into the tax net. This exercise will draw in rural and urban landowners to a great extent, for the first time agriculture tax is liable to be imposed realistically. Another great service will be the clear delineation of ownership, most of the cases in the courts of law stem from blurred ownership

One major faction opposed to census will be criminals who will fear quick location of their safe houses as police officers at the Police Stations (Thana)

have computerised information about the inhabitants in their area available at their fingerstips. Political parties that rely on militants to enforce their the district level. fiat will also be unhappy with this exercise. Given all this animosity, the government did well to mobilise almost onethird of the Army to support the Census Operation, otherwise it would have ended up as an exercise in futility. The Army s presence and countercheck has been a great restraint on attempted fraud, notwith-

standing the posture of Ms Benazir whose ethnic majority in Sindh is set to become a minority. The census being conducted in a peaceful and organized manner is a great feather in the Army's cap, a national duty that simply had to be done. It is a real wonder how this

country has been managed till date with virtually unmaginary statistics. How can planners across the board really organise their initiatives without facts and figures? In this modern age, these facts and figures have to be available in real time i.e at the touch of a finger on the computer. For that a whole national database has to be com-

Admission seekers

with money

admission test of Honours First

Year at Dhaka University is

completely a faulty one. As the

question paper is of MCQ type

with only one set, one can eas-

that the university is facing a

great abasement and its reasons

are not very far to be found out.

From the admission test stu-

dents learn to do illegal things

which result afterwards in their

perpetual crimes. Some stu-

dents before their admission

test look for some bright stu-

dents who will appear at the test

filling up forms with them in

exchange of money. It is heard

that there are some organised

groups who take money from

the students assuring them of

much of it is true! But it de-

serves investigation. I have also

experienced it - people came to

me with alluring proposal of

paying money if I just sit for the

It is mysterious as to how

their getting chance.

test with them to assist.

Department of English,

University of Dhaka

and even nations.

Kamal Uddin

It is acknowledged by all

ily copy others' papers.

Sir, The present system of

pleted. For this purpose the government has set up a National Database Organisation (NDO) headed by a serving major general with a known aptitude for such a task. The NDO now has a gigantic task before it, first to sift through the many questions in the Census Forms and

transfer the answers into computer language. This exercise of keying in data will take not less then 2-3 years, so will the organization of terminals down to As the designated DG NDO states, it is this for the govern-

ment to decide who will have access to such information, whether it will be limited to government agencies or whether private parties cleared by the government that can tap into the database. Because of the advances in computer hacking, the NDO will be hard put to maintain computer security and data may will be available to those who want to profit illegally from it. As such the NDO will have to restrict the acquirement of personal data of individuals so that it is only available on request. This brings as to the question of invasion of privacy. Privacy is guaranteed to the individual under the constitution but with

the national database avail-

OPINION

able, the government may become the greatest offender in invading the guaranteed right of the individual for privacy. This may make the govern-

ment into virtually a "big brother", manipulating and thus controlling the destinies of the citizens. There is dire need for enacting such laws that will forbid the government from using personal information about the individual for ulterior motives. Off course, if the individual is involved in activity that is criminal or anti-state that would be reason enough but a mechanism must be put in place to obtain a court order otherwise governments in Third World countries are likely to target the opposition out of a political vendetta.

In every field of governance data is needed, nothing is more disturbing to Pakistan than illegal immigration. This artificial influx tends to create schism that lead to disunity. For a country on the verge of disintegrating psychologically, if not physically, the national census provides a modicum of cohesion. With the availability of raw data within 5-6 months. the entire spectrum of country management will undergo a radical change for the better. As such the national census may be labelled not only as a welcome and extremely useful exercise, but one of vital importance to the continued existence of the nation as a viable entity.

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Did Botulism kill Dr. **Nasim Biswas?**

they are located and/or dis-

persed around the country, how

what to talk about taking socio-

can they manage the nation

Sir, The cause of the untimely death of Dr. Biswas is yet to be identified. According to the newspaper reports, he had dinner at a wedding party on Wednesday night. Then he suddenly developed vomiting which was followed by respiratory paralysis.

Botulism is a kind of food poisoning caused by Clostridlum Botulinum which is a toxin-producing bacteria. One is affected after eating canned, smoked or vacuum packed food. Twelve to thirty-six hours after ingestion of the toxin, visual disturbances like double vision and loss of accommodation occurs. Ptosis (drooping of eyelids), cranial nerve palsy, and fixed dilated pupil are other signs. The patient may have dry mouth, difficulty in swallowing and in speech. The sensorium remains clear and the temperature normal. Nausea and vomiting may be present, particularly with Type E toxin. Respiratory muscle paralysis may lead to death unless mechanical assis-

tance is provided. I don't know what exactly happened to Dr. Biswas, but if these were the signs and symptoms, then the investigating doctors could think over Botulism as a differential diagno-

Dr. A Nasser Khan House No. 2 Gulshan Avenue Gulshan 1, Dhaka 1212

Beware!

Sir, Some very mysterious events have taken place recently. They include the violating a 6-year-old girl within the CMM building, weekend gas disruption, price hike of onions and salt as well as the despicable incident in the Shaheed Minar. All these have taken place in a very short time span of less than a month.

and enact laws - laws that they

themselves do not recognise but

others are forced to accept.

Many of the ills afflicting our

What does these prove? Is conspiracy against the government is going? We, the general public, can only suffer up to a limit. As soon as the trust break down then there will be a price to pay. Please don't wait for that to happen. Then all hell will break loose. We have seen enough of strikes and non cooperations in the past. We don't want to see them anymore. There will be a situation when the government has to face the public rather than mere opposition in the Parliament if this

continues. We beg you to wake up and take preventing measures so that no more so-called accidents happen anymore. We want to live in a peaceful society and see the improvement in our lifestyle rather than a degradation.

Am I only to feel this way? Isn't there anyone out there who feels the same way? No matter which political party rules this fair country of ours. all we want is some prevailing peace. Is that too much to ask

Masroor Ahmed Deepak

Honour M Fazlur Rahman

Sir, Mr M Fazlur Rahman was a one of the eminent educationists of our country, with immense and valuable contribution. Mr Fazlur Rahman, during his span of career of over three decades, worked as Professor, Principal of key institutions of our country, later as Director of Public Instruction and Chairman of the then School Text Book Board before being moved over as Member of the then Central Public Service Commission. His glorious career was enriched by his commitment to the principles of truth and justice both in

thought and practice. Moreover, his contribution to improve the quality of the education in our country shall ever be cherished. Many would recall his spirited role in challenging many whimsical and motivated decisions of the colonial Pakistani rulers and their unethical practices in our academic arena. As an outstanding scholar and academician, Mr Rahman rose to the occasion to uphold and promote the cause of the Bengalis, during critical moments and more courageously as a member of the erstwhile Central Public Service Commission.

In this particular position Mr Fazlur Rahman fought against the injustices done to the then East Bengal regarding employment and sought to attain appropriate share of jobs for the Bengalis. Mr Fazlur Rahman's ability to resist evil and fight for the truth was further strengthened by his inspiring integrity of thought and action. No fear of subjugation or harassment or allurement of selfish gain could ever distract

him from his noble ideals. In the light of above, I would submit the following proposals for kind consideration of the government.

University in memory of Late

range Fazlul Rahman Memo-

may consider naming a street

Dhaka University may ar-

Dhaka City Corporation

Establishment of Fazlur

Mr M Fazlur Rahman.

Rahman Smriti Sangsad.

Dr Shibly Chowdhury

5, English Road, Dhaka

rial lecturers.

in his memory.

To accord national honour Donating blood and recognition to late Mr M Sir, Blood donation can Fazlur Rahman and to award him with Ekushe Padak or Inbuild up spiritual relationships dependence Day award. among men, women, families. To name a hall of the Dhaka

> heart nation. Our young people are also interested to participate in voluntary services like blood donation. A healthy man/woman can donate blood several times a year. What is needed is to help the organisations like Sandhani.

We are known as a soft-at-

Maeen Uddin Sabul 416, Zia Hall Dhaka University

Mobile Fun Lt Cdr (Rtd) M Gholam Mostafa

Apparently written in a humorous approach, the letter of Mr O J Shams (DS Feb 20, 1998) captioned "Tele(fun)" ventilated plight of numerous hapless mobile phone owners of Grameen variety. 'Grameen' exploded with such a novelty as to become a household word in Bangladesh and a source of curiosity in many other countries. Micro-credit was a bold innovation and a potent weapon towards empowerment of rural women-folk, hitherto proverbially poor and neglected, limiting their role to producing children, rearing them and attending to grinding mill of everyday household chores. Although all family activities revolved round the mother, her efforts went unheeded because it could not be quantified in terms of money which is the measure of tangible earning.

Micro-credit brought about a dramatic change in the scenario. Rural women proved to utter surprise of many that they were more credit worthy and conscientious than their male counterparts. They were also found to be gifted with inherent skills geared to production and efficient financial management. Financial empowerment gave them clout in the say of not only their own family; but also socially they became a power to reckon with. It gave them the confidence and dignity which was hitherto denied to them. An empowered woman set in a chain reaction in improvement of hygiene, nutrition and enlightened sense of family planning which followed collaterally. Consequent boon was an extra mileage towards poverty alleviation which forms the core of national strategy. Gains achieved by Grameen became a success story to be replicated in many coun-

tries including the US. The architect of Grameen rightly diagnosed lopsided communication facility as a po-

tent factor inducing impoverishment. To open up a colourful potent vista of informationhighway. Grameen mobile phone was made accessible to rural as well as urban clientele as yet another feather to the cap of this spectacular movement. Thousands of such sets were marketed at a discount price tag. Soon the cute contraption adorned every other person's pocket giving the owner a proud distinctive look among the common run.

Instead of depending on village Fariah (middleman) small farm producers could at once ascertain the obtaining prices of produces ruling in distant Hat/Bazar. The information thus available at the fingertips changed the whole dynamics of marketing, shifting bargaining chip from the Fariah to the small farm producers; Fariahs no longer able to cheat on the latter's ignorance. The idea was marvellous in as much it empowered the poor further arming them with valuable market information.

Then came the snag logjamming the "highway" Heaven fell on the owners because connection could hardly be made from mobile sets even after strenuous efforts - longer trying ran out its energy source making it dead. The incentive offered for charge-free incoming calls turned out to be a hoax as too few calls matured. In the process, the mobile phone lived up to its name in so far as its mobility was limited to that of the owner who moves with it from one place to another in course of his day-to-day business. The induction of mobile phone in the name of opening information highway has reflected adversely on the whole Grameen strategy. The ornamental piece called Grameen phone now hangs around the neck of its owners like proverbial "Albatross"

The writer is an advocate