

JRC Decisions

The outcome of the 33rd Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission meeting held in New Delhi on April 9-10 reads fairly positive in the shape of a joint communique issued at the end of it. It is noteworthy that the BJP-led minority government in India, true to the commitment of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, has lived up to the spirit of the Ganges Water Treaty signed with Bangladesh by predecessor Deve Gowda government. Held after a time-lag of two years, the JRC meeting in New Delhi has proved extremely useful in bridging the gaps over management of common water resources. Moreover, a review of the implementation of the Ganges Water accord fell due as a matter of utmost importance to Bangladesh, although the JRC is mandated to look after a wider field encompassing 53 other common rivers flowing between the two countries.

As for the immediate concern about the dry spell India gave Bangladesh to understand that there would not be any problem for the latter to get her due share of the Ganges water, Indian State Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources referred to the treaty clause that requires of the two sides to meet if the water level were to fall below 50,000 cusecs. The discrepancy in the distribution of water to Bangladesh in 1997 has been a subject matter of study by a joint technical committee which is to submit its report by 2000 AD. Let the findings be recommendatory of what needs to be done to avert any recurrence of such a shortfall at the Bangladesh end. Joint monitoring at each other's sites is to be regarded as an important element to the implementation process.

What appears as a definite step forward in the matter of sharing common water resources is the decision taken about the Teesta river. The Joint Experts' Committee led by the respective water secretaries are to finalise their recommendations in six months' time about the sharing of the Teesta river waters and submit the same to the next JRC meeting likely to be held in November-December of the current year. The experts' committee is now poised to be fully active. That eight other common rivers have been identified for action is good augury.

It is heartening to note that India has agreed to transmit upper riparian data to Bangladesh by way of a flood alert with 72 hours of lead time in place of 48 hours hitherto given to Bangladesh.

If the JRC meeting is held every six months as has been decided upon, we shall be on the road to better cooperation in managing the common water resources.

Ominous Signs

What the Old City experienced on Thursday were violent expressions of anger and frustration of a section of people anguished over a long period of time without water and electricity in the scorching summer. Newspapers were so full of them the next day. Although their predicament would almost seem to justify the course they resorted to, nevertheless, the fact remains that the incidences of violence, ranging from ransacking the offices of DESA and WASA to obstructing the passage of a Dhaka-bound train, amount to taking the law in their own hands and thus, are highly deplorable. However, these incidents have also sounded an ominous warning that the usually law-abiding citizens are at the end of their tethers, and that similar public outbursts may occur at anytime and anywhere in the country, unless the authorities concerned take immediate and effective measures to tackle the acute water and power supply crises. Signs are already there. Subscribers' association has already called an eight-hour hartal in Barguna, protesting frequent power failures.

That uninterrupted supply of electricity is a precondition to distribution of water makes the DESA doubly responsible. Nearly 50 per cent of WASA pumps, installed at different parts of the capital, have been rendered either inoperative or out of order due to erratic supply of power. DESA, on the other hand, has had its share of misfortune, too. Breakdown of the Siddhirganj grid station Thursday, caused by night storm and lightning, was certainly beyond their control. However, what the power authorities should have done, which, we believe, would have gone a long way towards averting the untoward incident, was communicate the exact position to the people and assure them of an early amelioration. Better articulation of PDB's or DESA's mitigative measures to cope with the crisis, even their development plans, would certainly engender better understanding with people and, thus, eliminate possibilities of future flare-ups.

We demand that the government immediately let the people know about the true magnitude of the power and water crises together with a definitive time-table announced for the mitigation measures.

Blood Pressure Cases on Rise

The number of high blood pressure patients in the country is on the rise. According to experts at a seminar, around 10 to 15 per cent of the adult population in the country and 22 per cent of the city dwellers are suffering from high blood pressure due to various reasons.

About 30 per cent of the afflicted run the risk of succumbing to stroke due to hypertension and irregular medication. Research has shown that around 75 per cent of the patients do not receive proper medical care and attention or do not take medicines regularly. Complete dietary regimen along with light exercise and stoppage of smoking can help reduce high blood pressure. These can also reduce the chances of diabetes.

Combined together high blood pressure and diabetes are killer diseases. Diabetes can be kept under control without medication by a dietary regimen and regular light exercise, specially walking. But blood pressure can hardly be controlled without medication. And once doctors prescribe medicine, it has to be taken regularly without fail because continuous high pressure does incalculable harm to some vital organs of the body, like the kidney, which can prove fatal. High pressure can also cause damage to brain through strokes or cause severe heart attacks. Since the facilities for treatment of such a huge number of patients are woefully inadequate it is better to stay healthy by sticking to the advice of the physicians and religiously taking medication, where necessary.

Declaration of Palestinian State

The possible course for President Arafat could be a declaration saying that the Palestinian people, as per UN Resolutions and Oslo Accord and other Agreements, are now fully entitled to a State of their own, but he would delay the formal announcement by one year. In the meantime, he would wait for the judgement of the Israeli people in the general election, which, he hopes, will be in favour of peace.

The Peace Process would end up in a Deal that would ensure the return of all occupied land to the aggrieved party — the Palestinians — and ensure Palestinian homeland.

Now the major question Arafat faces is whether he should unilaterally declare Palestinian State on May 4, 1999 — the day the stipulated five year period will be over giving the Palestinians their right to a State. Before the expiry of the self-rule period the transfer of the agreed territory to the Palestinian self-rule and negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem were to be completed. But unfortunately Netanyahu

cerned around the world. This was an appropriate politico-diplomatic step. Undoubtedly Arafat received wide support on the issue of recognition of the Palestinian State but unilateral declaration without having gone through the process of Final Status negotiations with Israel was an issue that needed serious consideration. The important players, among others, are the US, EU, Russia, China, Norway etc and obviously the views of these countries, among others, are important for Arafat to arrive at a final decision on the question of unilateral declaration of the Palestinian State.

port to the Palestinian State and this was conveyed to President Arafat when he visited Dhaka during that time.

Israel has been rightly concerned about its security and the EU position fully guarantees Israel's security. Indeed, Israel now has the opportunity to ask for security guarantees from the EU and the US once it complies with all the terms and conditions of the existing agreements including Wye Accord into which the US Administration and particularly President Clinton invested precious time and prestige. The commitment of the US to Israel's security is well known and the US support for Israel has been unwavering.

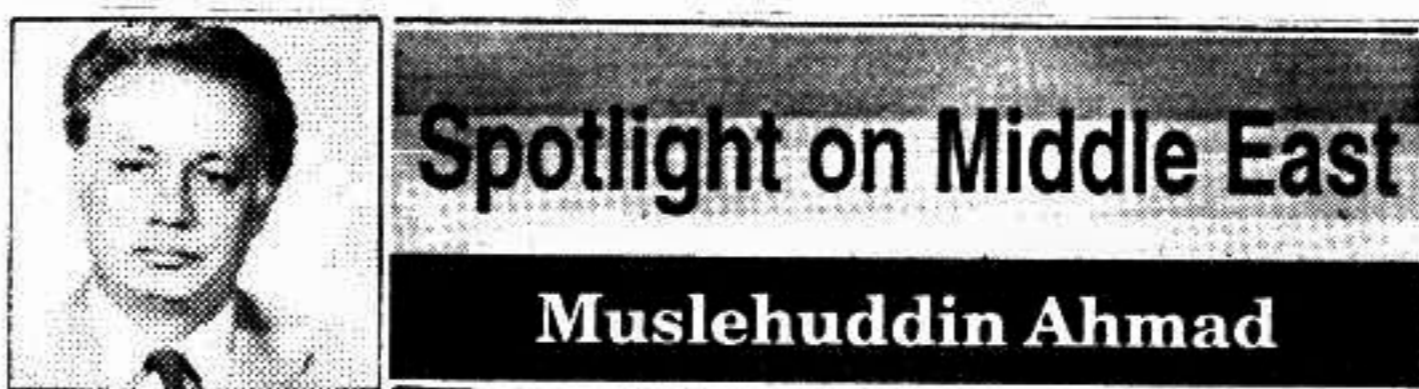
Even after EU's open support to Arafat by giving Israel a one-year deadline the US Administration did not come up with any deadline. It, however, reportedly said after President Arafat's latest meeting with President Clinton at the White House that after the General Election on May 17, the US would speed up the final status talks. Apparently President Clinton assured President Arafat that the final status negotiation would not be open-ended. This may not mean any specific deadline but does indicate some time-frame which Israel would have to adhere to.

As various reports show, there has been some considerable shift among Israeli public towards peace. A great majority of Israelis now support peace with proper security for Israel. Israeli newspaper Maariv and his aides now privately confirm that "there is no way of averting the establishment of a Palestinian State" but they do insist that Israel's ultimate consent to a Palestinian State "ought to be used as a bargaining chip". Surprisingly, Ariel Sharon, the toughest hard-

liner, has publicly admitted that "Palestinian independence is a foregone conclusion and most polls show that most Israelis understand that".

With the above situation in Israel and assurances from the main players in world's political theatre Arafat may not be in a hurry but he must at least be seen to be in hurry as he has to take care of his people who are at the end of their patience. However, only compulsion seems to be Arafat's health; he may like to complete the deal, close the chapter, give a State to his people and then retire. But in any case unilateral declaration should not be in the card, opportunity to Netanyahu to use it most effectively in the next general election. He will take immediate action to galvanise the Israeli population in his favour. Any unilateral declaration will unite his coalition partners and may even lead to a decision to reoccupy areas already returned to the Palestinian Authority. Netanyahu may even abandon all the agreements including Oslo Accord thus jeopardizing the entire Peace Process. The Palestinian Authority has no force to resist such Israeli action. The result may be the end of the peace process and total chaos may engulf the entire region.

The possible course for President Arafat could be a declaration saying that the Palestinian people, as per UN Resolutions and Oslo Accord and other Agreements, are now fully entitled to a State of their own, but he would delay the formal announcement by one year. In the meantime, he would wait for the judgement of the Israeli people in the general election, which, he hopes, will be in favour of peace. He remains prepared to abide by the existing Agreements and sit with next Israeli government for working out the details for peace and security of both Palestinian State and Israel so that total peace and security of the Palestinian people and Israelis, and also of the people of the region can be ensured.



Spotlight on Middle East Muslehuddin Ahmad

government deliberately delayed the transfer of the land despite Wye Agreement and the negotiations on the final status did not even begin. The US Administration later got bogged down in the Lewinsky affair and Prime Minister Netanyahu took full advantage of this. In the face of political instability in Israel and repeated threat from the coalition partners to pull down Netanyahu government, the Prime Minister called for the general election on May 17. The setting of the election date after May 4, the stipulated date for possible declaration of the Palestinian State was certainly deliberate as Netanyahu wanted to make a political use of any unilateral declaration of Palestinian State by President Yasser Arafat.

In the wake of such a cunning step by Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Arafat decided to consult the leaders con-

The EU in its summit in Berlin reportedly adopted a resolution on March 26 that not only supports the Palestinians' right to a State but went a step further by giving Israel "one-year deadline for fulfilling the unqualified Palestinian right to independence." The EU appears to be ready to recognise the Palestinian State unilaterally by saying that Palestinian self-determination "is not subject to any veto." It also said that the Palestinians have unqualified right to self-determination "including the option of a State." The EU reportedly further added that it was "convinced the creation of a democratic, viable, peaceful sovereign Palestinian State on the basis of existing agreements and through negotiations would be the best guarantee to Israel's security." Similar views have been expressed by some other countries too. Bangladesh also reportedly given full sup-

India in Deep Political Crisis

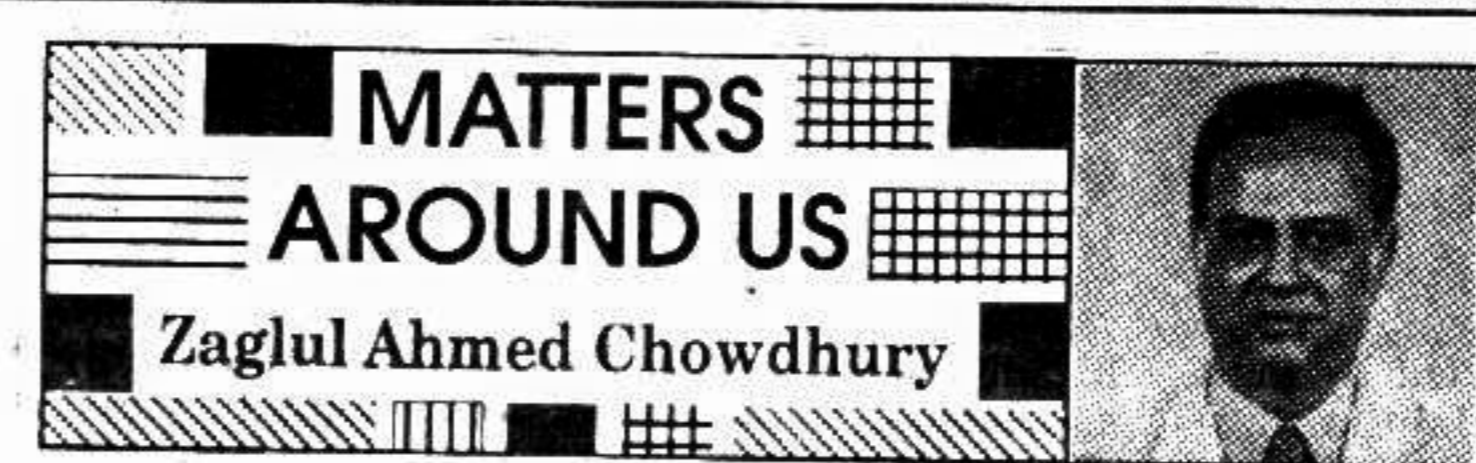
Certainly, the present government faces a collapse if it loses 18 votes of the AIADMK party as currently it has support of hardly ten members (with the AIADMK support) more than the required absolute majority in the 544-member Lok Sabha. When the 18 members formally withdraw support, the Vajpayee government will be reduced to minority

POLITICAL developments in India over the last few days have certainly given rise to intense speculations over the future of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government. The prime minister and other leading politicians of the ruling coalition have, however, put on a brave face, claiming that they will still enjoy the majority support, even if Jayaram Jayalalitha's AIADMK withdraws support. The opposition parties, on the other hand, seem convinced that the one-year-old multi-party government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is on the brink of a collapse and it may happen in a very short time. As each side tries to make its side of the story more convincing than the other, what surfaces is an ominous truth — India is in a deep political crisis.

The magnitude of the problem is such that the country may have to go for fresh elections despite the fact that no one really wants snap polls so early. If the government falls owing to lack of necessary support required to govern the country, the country is faced with two options — either a new government comes up only after the president is convinced that the new party, grouping or al-

liance enjoys absolute majority or the nation goes for new polls as an ultimate alternative if the formation of a new government becomes really difficult. However, there is also a third possibility. The present government may cling to power with unexpected support from certain parties or quarters. They may bail the Vajpayee government out not out of admiration for the government, but because they deem it lesser enemy than the prospective replacement.

The present situation has arisen out of major policy shift of AIADMK. The party from southern Tamil Nadu has virtually snapped all ties with the government and announcement of a formal withdrawal of support is imminent. The AIADMK-BJP relationship has been bumpy since the beginning of the alliance back in March 19, 1999. It has hit the nadir in recent days. This development has changed the political complexion of the country since the Vajpayee govern-



MATTERS AROUND US Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

ment remained in power on a water-thin majority. The withdrawal of the support by 18 AIADMK legislators can cause the fall of the government if there is a voting on the floor of the house unless the ruling coalition succeeds in garnering support from other quarters to obviate the setback. Jayalalitha's difference with the government rose on a variety of issues like Prime Minister Vajpayee's refusal to dismiss the government in the Tamil Nadu run by her rival DMK party and, of late, the sacking of naval chief Admiral Vishnu Bagwat — an issue which is raising a lot of dust in the political arena of the country and on which the AIADMK took a line similar with the op-

position parties. As such, AIADMK's change of heart has not come as a surprise.

Certainly, the present government faces a collapse if it loses 18 votes of the AIADMK party as currently it has support of hardly ten members (with the AIADMK support) more than the required absolute majority in the 544-member Lok Sabha. When the 18 members formally withdraw support, the Vajpayee government will be reduced to minority. But the government is not sitting idle under such a precarious situation. It is looking for new allies and support and the DMK party in the Tamil Nadu is among the parties which are being wooed by the ruling coalition. The DMK and its leader N. Karunanidhi, who is the chief minister of the state, are against the government but are now being approached by the ruling circles since Mr. Karunanidhi's arch-rival Jayalalitha is no more with the government. Mr. Vajpayee has said that main anger of Ms. Jayalalitha is that the government rejected her demand to dismiss the Karunanidhi government in Tamil Nadu and it is now the responsibility of the DMK to bail out Vajpayee government. The DMK said it is watching the developments and take a decision at later stage. The government is in the quest of similar supports and it remains to be seen how far it succeeds in securing such support.

Obviously, as the main opposition party, the Congress of Sonia Gandhi will stake the claim for formation of the new government but it lacks necessary support. It can form a government if the centre-left United front provides with the required support but all the constituents of the UF are not equally favourable to the

Congress. While the two main communist parties CPM and the CPI said they are willing to support a Congress-led secular government from outside, some smaller left parties like the forward bloc and others have reservations. However, that attitude can change. But two main centrist parties — the Sawajjal

Party of Mulayam Singh Yadav in the Uttar Pradesh and Rastriya Janata Dal of Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar — are lukewarm. They support the Congress in forming a government although they want the present government to go and replaced by a secular one. Backstage efforts are continuing to patch up differences. Most parties have their terms and conditions, and it remains to be seen how the situation develops and who can extract what in the process of new understanding and polarisation.

To the Editor...

Visa-seeker's harassment

Sir, I am a visa-victim, so to say. I wish to draw your attention to the harassment I have suffered at the British High Commission, Dhaka. I had submitted an application for a visit visa to facilitate my participation at the International Conference of Historical Geographers, Northern Ireland (19-28 July 1998) where my research paper was selected and I was invited to go there to present my paper. But the HC did not issue me a visa and the Entry Clearance Officer stated rather insulting reasons for the refusal of my visa.

He wrote, "You have submitted documents which I believe to be false or falsely obtained." Now this statement is contrary to the fact. I submitted a genuine invitation letter and a bank statement. Therefore, I challenged the decision and wrote to the second Secretary, Immigration, stressing that, "My invitation letter and bank statement are genuine." The Organiser of the International Conference sent a letter of confirmation of my invitation to the High Commission. Then, in a letter dated 28 June 1998, the second secretary wrote me, "I am prepared to accept that you have a genuine invitation to attend the conference."

Another reason given for the refusal of the visa stated: "You have never previously undertaken a comparable foreign visit," although I had visited foreign countries before. I attended an International Conference in Singapore in July 1995. I was also invited to attend the International Conference in Beijing in 1996 and was given a visa for China. I visited India several times. So, it is evident that, the above statements of the High Commission officials, were wrong and made intentionally to harass me.

Another case of my harassment by the UK mission is as follows. I was accepted by the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, UK for full-time study (Ph D Programme-1998-99). My relative in the UK sponsored me

Congratulations to the PM

Sir, Congratulations to the PM for winning the UNESCO peace award. Keep up your good work. This is not only an honour for you but also for the entire country. We are proud of you. Critics will criticize. But you should continue your work. You should never forget that good work will always be rewarded what other says.

S M Mizanur Rahman Arif Cottage, House: B-12, Arapara, P O Savar, Dhaka-1340.

The other side of D-8

Sir, Now that the formal conference of the D-8 is over in Dhaka, it is time some outside observers pointed out some of the weak points in the proper perspective. D-8 is a truncated split of the great OIC, and sans the Arab League. The Arab states are not in D-8, perhaps due to the presence of Iran, and may be Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait have just resumed diplomatic relations, leaving behind the Jordan-Iraq stand during the Gulf War.

There is no CIS representation in D-8. The positive presence and contribution of Nigeria has to be watched after the recent 'democratic' general elections in Nigeria where one of the earlier autocrats has been returned to power through people's voting rights (the latter term is much abused in Bangladesh). One temporary blockade is

Unstable Afghanistan

— the unstable forces being generated and kept up from outside sources, Russia, then a superpower, failed there. Now pawn-ship is going on. The Muslim powers are rather demure about the political stability and return of peaceful conditions in that country, as both Iran and the Arab countries are interested. The strategic importance of Afghanistan is that it is the linking corridor among the CIS, ME, South and SE Asia. We are putting the wrench between the spokes?

How much the OIC is backing up D-8 morally, structurally, financially, and politically? The same questions may be asked of the closed Arab League. These three Islamic organisations have to come to terms amongst themselves for a united global stand, and send a common message to the ummah.

A musician with the magic touch

Sir, On January 27, 1999, Satya Saha, the country's renowned music composer, director and singer breathed his last at a Calcutta clinic. On the sad and sudden demise of this celebrated artist, Bangladesh has lost a genius in the field of music. Everyone is now deeply feeling the necessity of preserving the outstanding works of this late genius. At the end, Emon Saha, son of late Satya Saha has produced a musical album with some remixed popular songs of his father. The album titled "Chena Chena Lage" has recently been released.

However I must say that while listening to the songs of the above mentioned album, I could hardly feel the magical touch of the original composer, Satya Saha. I think the songs should have been recorded in their original form instead of remixing. It is expected that the concerned will take appropriate steps to preserve the songs of the late music composer. M Zahidul Haque BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Make 'em Laugh

THE official arrival of spring in Washington is not when the cherry blossoms bloom, but when the Gridiron Club holds its annual roast of the Washington establishment. Five or six hundred of the nation's elite newspaper people and leaders put on white ties and fancy dresses and gather in a hotel ballroom to preen and laugh at the things they are supposed to take seriously for the rest of the year.

I have never been a member of the Gridiron Club, though I will fight to the death for their right to be funny (and have almost been killed doing so).

My role has been to occasionally help the featured speakers with their talks. The programme calls for one sparky Democrat, one sparky Republican and the president of the United States.

The speeches are usually joint efforts, with five or six writers sitting around a room like those who create monologues for Jay Leno or David Letterman.

I was drafted once by Jack Valenti to work on President Lyndon B Johnson's talk. It was his first appearance in front of the Gridiron as president, having just succeeded John F Kennedy.

Johnson told Valenti he wanted to be funny, and all we went to work. I don't remember the gags — Pierre Salinger was the butt of some, Robert Novak, too, and possibly Bobby Kennedy was also a target.

The big night finally came, and all the writers, in white tie and tails, waited nervously to see how the president did. Johnson never saw the humour in the Gridiron skits, and as the evening progressed he got madder and madder.

When it was his turn to get up, all he said was something like, "I want to thank you for this lovely evening. Good night." He sat down.

My heart sank as I realised two weeks of work had gone down the White House garbage disposal unit.

The end of the story is that a couple of weeks later I was introduced to the president and he said, "Art, I can't thank you enough for all the fine work you did on my Gridiron speech."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicates and UNB.

OPINION

Post-Cold War Avalanche

Abul M Ahmad

On every front, things are going wrong and out of control. That is the way it has to be, according to the Chaos theory, newly discovered by the western scientists (every cell knows what is happening to the other cells in the whole universe, including the Earth). Countries like Bangladesh are also in turmoil, enmeshed in the changing phases towards a new world order. The politicians think things will be under political control. The situation is already out of control, not only in Bangladesh, but in other South nations. The avalanche will sweep those in the way. The force of the collective thinking of the oppressed is far greater than those of the oppressors. The time has come for stock-taking, morally and spiritually.

Therefore the desperation in the hasty actions. Asia suffered due to the Western greed. Now a new colonial weapon is being tried: the WTO or the World Trade Organisation, trimmed to cut the veins of the Third World, including Asia, where the action will be during the 21st century. The signs are there all right on the wall; but some deliberately feign indifference. Islam will suffer before it rises again, the world's last perfected religion. The North is deliberately up to destroy the world of Islam, the second largest religion after Christianity. The time is approaching for the transfer of power. Weak Russia will play the spoiler's role, neither she nor the West can save her or the others who think they control the destiny of Russia, now neither communist or democratic.

It is time to pay attention to the changing phases of human destiny controlled from above, but spotted by man's so-called ingenuity.