The Baily Star

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Build on the Dialogue Offer

It is the spirit in which opposition leader Khaleda Zia has expressed her readiness for a dialogue with the government that must be noted and reciprocated by the ruling party for what it really is worth. To us it is worth its weight in gold. Set against the backdrop of the bridge ban going her latest offer for talks with the government has a ring of conviction and plausibility about it. If the ruling party were to paper over it as 'an opposition gimmick' it would be sadly mistaken. In fact, it would be missing the bus.

Begum Zia has demanded a 'congenial atmosphere' for the talks to begin. And her affirmation that 'all problems' can be resolved in a democratic system through dialogue and discussion makes her sound forthcoming and positive. She has reasons to be satisfied that a major stride was taken in that direction in the shape of the Government-BNP deal for the passage of the long march through the Bangabandhu Bridge. We think an opening has been created in the closed atmosphere and the ruling party must seize the opportunity of expanding it to a dialogue proportion.

it to a dialogue proportion. We recall with a considerable degree of disappointment that another golden opportunity for ending confrontational politics had been lost in the past. The ruling party failed to seize it on the question of abjuring the hartal option that cropped up on a fluent note last year. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had announced in November last year that her party would not call any hartal and urged the opposition to reciprocate her offer. Earlier in April Opposition leader Begum Zia had said that if Sheikh Hasina made a commitment a priori that when in the opposition she would not herself call a hartal then the former would be willing to forsake the same now. Nothing came off this wonderful prospect opposition offered for because

it was not pursued with the seriousness it deserved. The ruling party should be wizened now to capitalise on the dialogue specially when, by Khaleda Zia's own admission, her current 'programmes are aimed at avoiding hartal.' She certainly has gone for alternatives to hartal such as mass procession, procession by MPs, hunger strike and the like.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's call for peace at the Hague conference has reverberated to us. Her role as a peace builder in the CHT has received plaudits from the UNESCO. We urge for peace in our polity now and keep faith with her avowal for democratic practices and values. Let the PM practice at home what she just preached abroad. We expect her to get a move on for an early dialogue with the opposition.

Working Without Permits

An increasing number of foreigners are working in the energy sector of Bangladesh without proper work permit. A report published in The Daily Star on Sunday cites the reasons for such a situation in this vital sector of our economy. Instead of appointing local staff some of the companies have even appointed the wives of top bosses. And many of them who are said to be on business visa are working without work permit.

It is normally expected that in the age of globalisation and foreign investment more and more foreigners would be working in our country but the long-drawn and cumbersome process of issuing work permits to them dampens their spirit. The process of renewal is also difficult to negotiate even though the interest is genuine. The faulty monitoring system of the authorities is another reason why there are so many foreigners working without permit which is not permissible in terms of the PSCs.

The process of issuing work permits and their renewal must be simplified so that the foreigners are encouraged to apply for them. There must be a sense of adherence to the process than an attitude of disregard for it. Once this is ensured the relevant laws should be applied strictly so that the openings for the locals are made use of in accordance with the PSCs which envisages intake of four locals against one foreigner. Unless this is done there will be tendencies to dodge the rules and employ more foreigners at the expense of the employment opportunity for the locals.

Look Before You Leap

In an atmosphere where concerns for financial oddities loom large, the proposal for creating a position of "Loan Ombudsman" for quick settlement of loan cases sounds interestingly agreeable. But the recommendation should be studied carefully before the suggested post is in place. It is true that Bangladesh's financial institutions, especially the loan-disbursing establishments, are in favour of early resolution of the loan-related disputes. This is more true when we find influential people's connivance with a section of the administration to let matters stall on this front. This fraction of the society has indeed created a default raj of their own.

A departure from the conventional system — as far as the office of the Ombudsman is concerned sounds innovative no doubt, but it gives rise to a set of questions that beg answer. The proposal of the committee dealing with it has to go to the finance ministry for a final decision. Has the body that suggested the post taken into account the experiences of other countries where the office of Ombudsman has been at work? Taking the international practice into cognisance, in Bangladesh's perspective, is there such a "person" of repute, command and expertise who can pronounce impartial verdict? Quite possibly we can find an 'honest expert' skilled in handling financial matters; nevertheless, the fact that he will be the final arbiter makes us approach the proposal with great caution.

If this novel idea succeeds with proper safeguards, the financial sector, which for long has been in a shambles, may come out of the woods. But the finance ministry should look before it leaps. It should closely examine the pros and cons of this new concept.

Kashmir after a Decade of Militancy

By any reckoning the stakes in the dispute is higher with India which holds the defiant state with enormous political and economic cost and has all the risks of 'losing' totally or partially. On the contrary Pakistan stands only to gain and has little to lose. But for the moment it is the Kashmiris who are the net losers in the conflict.

on the floor of the United Nations to fight thousand years' war for Kashmir. The Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 over Kashmir was already raging in was variously interpreted as full fury. But within days his greater autonomy within Incountry accepted an dian Union or complete indeunconditional ceasefire. Alpendence from India. Some also though Bhutto distanced himcalled for Kashmir's unificaself from Tashkent process aftion with Pakistan. The upristerwards, he in 1972 signed ing in Kashmir valley took off a Simla Agreement accepting decade ago precisely from a strike called for 26 January conditions worse than those of Tashkent declarations and 1989 - India's Republic Day. virtually sealed the fate of Pakwhich later snowballed into istan's claim on Kashmir. intermittent strikes throughout Bhutto, in a way, confirmed the the year consuming one third of line of control established after its working days. Apart from 1948 ceasefire as international paralysing the civic life the boundary in Kashmir and militant groups adopted more agreed to put the dispute, if any, violent stratagems including in Kashmir in a bilateral targeted assassinations, kidnapping, bomb blasts and atframe. On India's part her problem tacks on government property. with Kashmir started afresh The Indian government retaliated by militarisation of the with ever-growing strain and

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▲ Zulfigar Ali Bhutto vowed

bole an impassioned

bitterness between New Delhi valley with half a million and Srinagar over host of issues troops and severe repression of even though she effectively neuthe militancy. tralised Pakistan factor at least In early 1990 the governfor the time being. A short-lived ment of Farooq Abdullah who Indo-Pakistan rapprochement came to power allegedly after Simla Agreement also through massive rigging in 1987 election was dissolved and started wearing out over Siachen glacier conflict and the state was put under the pres-Pakistan's alleged nuclear proident's rule. The first governor, gramme. The bilateralism on Jagmohan, compared the state Kashmir, although attempted, on his arrival in Kashmir to "a could not make headway and sprawling, lifeless octopus." Throughout the intense years of Pakistan substantially drifted away from Simla accord and the movement the state continstarted referring Kashmir again ued to be under the rule of sucto international fora. The final cessive governors whose inblow came, of course, from struction came from New Delhi. Indian journalists and political within with the uprising of the commentators conceded that Kashmiris themselves from the heavy-handed treatments of 1989 onward. In the late 1980s numerous the militants both before and political and militant groups in during the insurgency totally Kashmir valley began to quesalienated the Kashmiri people. tion the continuing allegiance Human Rights groups

Kashmir was regarded as a potential terrorist and treated as such. People were subjected to frequent curfew, cordon-and-search operations, arbitrary arrests, tortures, disappearances and detention without trial. As a result every family suffered the loss of one or more family member.

Only in 1996 the Indian authority struck a new strategy to contain the insurgency in Kashmir. New Delhi wanted to restore political process in the state with the hope of placating the defiant Kashmiris. Perhaps

an empty feeling of stalemate about the whole issue. The line of control marking the point at which the hostilities ceased in 1948 remains the de facto border between the part of Kashmir controlled and administered by Pakistan and that under India. The Indian government has made no concessions either before or during the insurgency to remove any of the grievances the Kashmiris have been voicing; neither has it eradicated the cause of insurgency or addressed the question of the



emboldened by 1983 election in Assam and 1992 election in Punjab, other two strife torn states in the grip of secessionist movements, the Indian government proceeded to take similar step in Kashmir to end the protracted insurgency in the state. The elections were however rejected by the Kashmiri activist members of the All Parties Hurrivat Conference who had renounced allegiance to India and as such refused to participate in the poll. Lacking any obvious political rival a pliant Farooq Abdullah was reelected as chief minister in, what Indian official commentator said, a "free and fair elec-

Now, ten years after the insurgency began and with countless dead and enormous destruction of properties, there is 1947 and outlined in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Yet it has firmly retained the physical control of the state till

Pakistan also is far from fulfilling its ambition of incorporating the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir under her jurisdiction. Instead, throughout the decade-long insurgency it was condemned by the Indian government for interference in the 'internal' affair of India. She was frequently accused of waging a proxy war in Kashmir across the line of control, by providing not only moral and diplomatic but also military and logistical support to those militant groups whose objective

The rhetoric and stands of the protagonists on both sides remain unchanged. While the

Indian government continues to maintain that the state of Jammu and Kashmir is 'an integral part' of India, it is also not prepared to shed its claim to 'Azad Kashmir' and 'Northern Areas' which it considers to be occupied by Pakistan. The government of Kashmir continues to assert that the whole state is disputed territory under the terms of the United Nations resolutions passed in 1947 and 1948 which stipulate that the inhabitants of the state of Kashmir should be permitted the right to determine whether they would prefer to be a part of India or Pakistan. The official Pakistan policy with regards to Kashmir is however silent on the third option — independence which seems to be the favoured choice of the most

Although the objective of the

hardline political activists is still the independence of the entire state and supported by both Yasin Malik and Amanullah Khan factions of the JKLF, the 'azadi' movement itself has much diluted by now with many leaders and militant groups renouncing militancy in favour of increased political activity. Many of those who directly suffered the consequences, of insurgency in the valley would now prefer peace in order to rehabilitate and demilitarise the state so that they can lure back the tourists, the major source of their livelihood. The international community, though sympathetic to the grievances of the Kashmiris, has however proved ineffective in exerting pressure on India to accede to their demands. Foreign governments especially those of the United States and Britain

Kashmiris.

offer mediation but inevitably fallen foul of the Indian government which resents any interference in what it considers to be its 'internal affair'.

Numerous talks contacts

Numerous talks, contacts and negotiations between India and Pakistan have not succeeded in improving their relations over what Pakistan calls the 'core' issue of their bilateral dispute. There could never be a consensus by India, Pakistan and varied inhabitants of the state to break the impasse. So much so that soldiers of both the countries continue to face each other at an altitude of 22,000 feet in the Siachen glacier for more than a decade. India has persistently maintained that there is no question of relinquishing any part of the state. At the same time the Pakistan government has been equally insistent that the status quo is not sustainable. Moreover, neither country has publicly stated that it could agree to the line of control as an international border.

The insurgency of the nineties in Kashmir has only been a phase in one of the longest surviving conflicts of the contemporary world. In the prevailing flux it cannot be said if any side has lost or won the conflict. By any reckoning the stakes in the dispute is higher with India which holds the defiant state with enormous political and economic cost and has all the risks of 'losing' totally or partially. On the contrary Pakistan stands only to gain and has little to lose. After a decade it started the militancy in Kashmir is by no means over although its players and dynamics might have changed. Now a nuclearised South Asia will have to keep its fingers crossed till the end of the tunnel is in sight in Kashmir. But for the moment it is the Kashmiris who are the net losers in the conflict.

How to Stop Lawlessness and Terrorism

Restructure and Upgrade Police

by Mohammad Siddiquer Rahman

Combing operations by police, BDR and others may be effective in arresting underground terrorists in particular areas on occasions. But this cannot be undertaken as a regular measure for prevention and detection of crimes... Restructuring and upgrading of police is essential to stop lawlessness and terrorism throughout the country.

complex. Whether in the cities, towns or the fur-flung rural areas, incidents of snatching, hijacking, extorting gunfighting, acid throwing, bombblasting and killing have become an everyday affair. The most significant thing is that the political terrorists and armed cadres are being reared, sheltered and supported by the political parties and their front organisations as reported in the press. The arms and ammunitions, explosives and other devices used by the political terrorists and armed mastaans are now modern and sophisticated and technologically advanced while the ordinary police with their outdated arms and equipment and without proper training to fight the armed hooligans or bomb squads, seem not in a position to handle and contain such terrorism and violence. Most important, the regular police force in the Thana, who deal with the crimes and criminals, have become so corrupt, demoralised and thus ineffective that it is just not possible for them to face the new brand of terrorists and criminals who can swoop down anytime so fast and so

of the state to Indian Union.

The young men and women of

Kashmir who took to the streets

in the movement of mass

protest called for 'azadi' which

(Second of four articles)

ODAY the magnitude and the nature of crime has

Under the circumstances, the present generation of police force has to be gradually phased out and replaced by a more effective and higher quality police with greater striking ability. But this would take time and it is most important to take

some immediate steps to contain the prevailing lawlessness and crimes. For this purpose it is essentially necessary to restructure and upgrade the police by raising a special Anti-Terrorist Police Force (ATPF) of a higher calibre and post them to each and every thana all over the country to effectively control armed violence and restore law and order. They should be specifically responsible to deal with cases of terrorism and violence, possession and use of unlicensed guns, bombs and explosives, acid throwing, robbery hijacking, arson and looting gun fights, and killing. The other ordinary crimes will be dealt with by the regular thana police working under the OC of the thana as usual.

Amnesty International, Asia

servers continually pointed to

the cases of gross human rights

violation. Every youth in

Watch, and independent ob-

The main force of the ATPF should be composed of police sergeants working under special police inspectors and Asst. Commissioners of ATPF at the thana level and a special Additional SP at the district-level. The ATPF will remain under the general supervision of the SP of the district. A contingent of five to 10 sergeants of ATPF

may be posted in each thana depending on the size of the thana and average incidence of crime. Suitable contingents of reserve force of ATPF may be posted at district headquarters. metropolitan cities and other vulnerable areas. Each of the sergeants must be provided with a motorcycle and necessary automatic arms to enable him to overpower the criminals and other adversaries. In reverine areas they should be given speedboats. The sergeants may be recruited form amongst a minimum of university graduates having superior physical ability to be combatants with a sense of commitment. They should be given intensive training on arms and explosives combat tactics, prevention and detection of crimes, collection of evidence, criminal laws and prosecuting the criminals in the court of law. They should be given a special pay of say 50 per cent of their salary equivalent to make the job attractive and work as an incentive to remain

On the other hand, there should be provision for heavy

anger over the threat on photo

journalists and press freedom.

Not only this time, the police

has attacked on the on duty

journalists several times be-

fore. In this regard Mr Anam

asked the government by re-

minding the incidence at the

Press Club during BNP regime

when police beat the journal-

ists, as saying "how can it be

right now, when it was wrong

then?" For this, the home min-

ister should apologise to the

parliament members, he re-

minded the AL government

about the attack on Matia

Chowdhury when they were in

the opposition. He wrote "how

can it happen at a time when a

party, which itself had been a

victim of such police brutality

for years, is in power?" Actu-

ally, it is our surprise too. A few

days ago police assaulted Sadeq

at the wrongdoing of the gov-

ernment by his commentaries

very often, but nobody seems to

care and that reminds us of the

popular proverb. "the scape-

grace never listen to moral lec-

We found Mr Anam pointing

Hossain, an MP of BNP.

S M Enayetur Raheem

On the issue of beating of

photojournalists.

punishments for dishonesty corruption and dereliction of duty. A special Judicial Tribunal should be constituted in each district with a district judge as the Chairman and an ADM, an Additional SP and a representative of the Bar Association as members; such cases should not be enquired or tried by departmental officers who are likely to be biased. The Tribunal may be given summary powers to enquire and try the cases. Inefficiency and non-performance of duty shall make the incumbent liable for dismissal. Corruption and dishonesty on the part of any member of the ATPF should be made punishable by imprisonment and fine. Conviction of such offence by any ATPF personnel would automatically make him liable for dismissal. Cases of corruption and dishonesty by any officer or staff of other departments of the district may also be enquired into and tried by the District Judicial Tribunal with the inclusion of the head of that department in the district as a member of the Tribunal. Officers of the rank of

Asst Commissioner and above may be tried for corruption and dishonesty by a Divisional Judicial Tribunal and the officers of the rank of SP and above may be tried by a National Judicial Tribunal set up with a High Court judge as the Chairman.

The existing thana police will deal with the normal law and order problems until they are gradually replaced by a new generation of upgraded police

All the efforts of the police in detecting and arresting the criminals and sending up a prosecution case to the court will go in vain unless the prosecution officer or public prosecutor can prepare and conduct the prosecution case in the court properly and successfully. Many of the criminal cases filed by the police in the court are defeated because of defective and legally untenable preparation and conduct of the cases by the prosecuting officers. Conduct of prosecution cases must therefore be given adequate importance. The practice of using the police sub-inspectors and

inspectors as prosecution officers in the courts of magistrates must be abandoned to improve the quality of conduct of the police cases.

Professionally qualified and

experienced lawyers with a reputation of honesty and competence should be appointed as prosecuting officers or public prosecutors. They should not be political appointees and should be appointed by a panel of Selection Board consisting the District Judge, District Magistrate and the SP of the district. Their appointment should not be required to be sent to the ministry for approval in the true spirit of decentralisation. They should be given a higher remuneration and a reward for winning each case. Punishments should also be provided for failure to perform. More than 20 per cent cases of failure in a year should make one liable for removal from the office. Remuneration may be paid on case by case basis so that they do not unnecessarily drag

It may, however, be noted here that combing operations by police, BDR and others may be effective in arresting underground terrorists in particular areas on occasions. But this cannot be undertaken as a regular measure for prevention and detection of crimes and arrest and prosecution of criminals for maintaining law and order throughout the country. Restructuring and upgrading of police is therefore essential to stop lawlessness and terrorism.

The author is a former Cabinet Secretary and Ambassador.

lingha Beiter

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

We condemn

Sir, The hand which first stretched out to strip a woman alleged to be a BNP activist at Bijoynagar in the city during the hartal hours on Tuesday, the 11th of May, 1999, belonged to a female member of our police force! Her action may have encouraged the other members of the force too (who were males). The national dalies printed almost the same photograph from different angles.

What kind of 'training' the law enforcing agency go through is something we all should ponder about. In this case the Police Force can claim the order had come from higher authorities and those sitting at the helms can proclaim of having learnt the art of stripping women from the past govern-

which took place in presence of several hundred people. Never did we hear of such an act taking place anywhere in the

Only Allah knows what we are to see next.

Mujibul Haque Mirpur Road Dhaka.

Power now, power then

Sir, What happened to Munira Begum of BNP on last hartal day was similar to what happened to Begum Matia Chowdhury of AL few years back. The only difference is, AL is in power now and BNP was in power then.

One cannot condone this one as because it was done by BNP before. What is mentionable with utter disgust is that how our politicians become so in-

sane and insensitive when they get the power. When in power they reciprocate the treatment they received while in opposition. I think this is a method they have developed to fool and mislead the people.

As the saying goes, 'What

Abul K Shamsuddin Toronto, Canada

Hazard of paying bills

goes around comes around'.

Sir, Every month, in almost all the authorised banks there are crowds and long queues for paying gas, telephone, water and electricity bills.

It may be mentioned that the system and procedure of paying bills and obtaining acknowledgment receipts thereof are manual, obsolete, out-dated and time consuming. As a result the members of public undergo great hardship, keep on waiting for a long time etc. This is a waste of time and energy and also a matter of great embar-

Why don't the bank authorities depute special and additional staff whenever there is a rush for payment of aforesaid

We would also like to request the bank authorities to modernise and computarise the system.

Sir, Thanks to Mr Mahfuz

Anam for his yet another bold

commentary. Among the three

issues he had pointed out, first

one indicated his concern and

6, Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka-1203.

Brave journalism

O. H. Kabir

Policing the police

Sir, Setting up a large number of police camps in the terrorism-hit South-Western districts of Bangladesh recently, the government has taken a giant step aiming at curbing terrorism. Mentionably, there had always been some police camps in the peripheral areas of those districts but experiences of the rural peace-loving people with those had not been up to the mark. Perceivably, those police camps could not render services to the people to the desired level

While talking to some rural people of extremism-hit areas of Kushtia sadar thana, expressing their overwhelming grievances, they opined that when the branded extremists roam around the police camp

area and make all types of friendship with the police personnel posted there then what better the innocent, peace-loving people expect from them. Asking for is there any way out they suggested that some police personnel in each camp should be of tribal origin, understandably, unable or unwilling to make unofficial or extra-official relations with the local people. They resolved that thus the prime objective of setting up permanent police camps in the extremism-hit areas could

While deliberating on the suggestion originating from the grassroots of the affected areas, it appeared that such a step could work as a counter-intelligence to keep our already stigmatised police force on the right track thus rendering better services to the people. The authorities concerned should think over it.

Md Abdul Jabbar Institute of Social Welfare and Research, DU

Turkey in trouble

Sir, The recent development in Turkish politics is a manifest violation of the norms of democracy, human rights and the individual rights to follow one's religion. Turkey is not the only secular state in the world. There are many other secular countries where Muslim women are maintaining their modest dress i.e. hijaab and the men are keeping beard. Even in the countries hostile to the interest of Islam, Muslim women are wearing headscarves to comply with their religious requirements. It is Turkey that is denying these basic human rights to the Muslim men and women.

In fact, the Turkish authority is perpetrating all these with their eccentric notion of secularism. It may be the spirit of secularism not to coerce any woman to wear headscarf but on which ground the secularists of Turkey are denying the Muslim women to wear hijaab?

Arifa Sharmin Elephant Road, Dhaka

General Managers

Sir, The Ministry of Fi-

nance made rule a few years

back that DFI i.e., BSB, BSRS

and HBFC would appoint their

General Managers from amongst their Dy General Managers duly approved by the Board of Directors of the respective institutions. But the case with NCBs is otherwise. Here the government by gazette notification make out a high pow ered Committee comprising Governor, Bangladesh Bank as Chairman and three other additional secretaries of the government's important depart ment and a Dy Governor of Bangladesh Bank as members. This committee takes interview of all DGM of NCB, BKB, Rukub and ICB who have completed at least 3 years as Dy General Manager and possess requisite qualification. After interview and study of personal profile and performance, the committee recommends a panel of DGM suitable for appointment/promotion as general manager. The Ministry of Finance, after approval of the recommended panel by the PM gives the final appointment in order of merit and gives posting of the promoted/appointed general managers to NCB, BKB, ICB and Rukub. The government also gives posting of such appointed/posted general managers to BSB, BSRS and HBFC on deputation basis. While posted on deputation the government appointed general managers are placed at par with the respective DFIs own general

A Kashem A Retired Banker Dhaka

pointed GMs.

Political gullibility

managers by the management

of respective DFI. This has been

found to be a point of frustra-

tion of the government ap-

Sir, Two articles in the March 26, interested me for blunt analysis and outspoken views. One was on the current autocratic political leadership within the two main political

parties, by Mahfuz Anam; and the other was on inequality alleviation (in addition to poverty alleviation) by Md

Anisur Rahman. In plain language, the economic and political godfatherism at the very top level have to be neutralised in public interest. The top players controlling the games won't respond, and would of course offer all sorts of excuses, and adopt go-slow tactics, as are being done in the case of judiciary and administrative reforms, sheltering the bank loan defaulters, not freeing the electronic media, and the lack of transparency in mega investment deals.

Today the circulation of black and grey money has risen to astounding proportions, resulting in greater non-transparency in all sectors of life, including governance. Unethical practices have poisoned the political field (like drinking arsenic contaminated water whose effect would be detected later). And, since politics is the biggest 'business' sector today (in the emerging countries), the fallouts are seen in every other sector.

When moral discipline is lax in a society, a hypnotic and self-delusive syndrome sets in, and the negative inertia propels the nations into pitfalls and bottomless holes, from which it is difficult to come out. Bangladesh has not yet come out of the economic and moral bottomless basket. And the politicians alone cannot solve the problem, because they are a part of the corrupted system.

If the present top leadership cannot rise to the occasion through stern self-disciplinary exercises, then the mass supporters will have to think otherwise, resulting in spontaneous reformatory movements, however unpleasant to the powers that be on either side of the

Some independent research agency may work out the "gullibility factor" of the average Bangladeshi.

battle ground.

A Zabr Dhaka