

## This is War in Kashmir

AN open conflict has broken out between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control in Kashmir. Indo-Pak relations have touched a new, dangerous low, clearly the worst dip in twenty-eight years. This is "not 1948, nor is it 1965, 1971," so goes the refrain singing an ode to nuclear deterrence that is banked on to inhibit a full-scale war now. India remains carefully 'well-calibrated', claimed a defence expert, in order that an escalation into a fuller war can be avoided. But realistically can they put a limit to how worse the conventional war itself can get, let alone the prospect of a nuclear nightmare? We think they cannot. For Pakistan's part, on the other hand, her Foreign Secretary has said, "We will not hesitate to use any weapon in our arsenal to defend our territorial integrity."

The danger in the whole situation is that it is escalatory by the very nature of its own dynamics. This is already in evidence. Within a week of the conflict, the Indian air strikes continue in tandem with ground operations; there has been eye-balling of Indo-Pak troops across the Line of Control; new theatres have opened along the LOC, and by all sights and sounds, the armed conflict is set to last long. Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh indicates, "there won't be any relenting on air and ground operations unless status quo ante is restored."

Both countries are claiming 'successes' in their respective campaigns like in a fully-fledged war situation. Pakistan says it has repulsed three separate ground attacks by Indian troops from border posts while India maintains it has driven back a large number of 'intruders' to the other side of the LOC. There have been military casualties on both sides. And, from the look of things, these are likely to mount to a point where the two countries might find it difficult to disengage with increased stakes in the conflict.

The civilian casualties are on the rise as thousands of people packed in buses, trucks and horse-driven carts leave their hearths and homes to escape the unceasing shelling and artillery attacks. So, we have a big humanitarian problem on our hands as well.

We are perturbed by the slow movement on the diplomatic front. We had expected a Sartar Aziz-Jaswant Singh meet before this week ran out, but it seems this might not take place before next week. Whatever it is, we want an immediate defusion of tension in Kashmir followed by an early resumption of agenda-specific talks that had commenced between India and Pakistan earlier on but which somehow went into an unceremonious limbo.

## Graceless Act

BAKLAHDESH Cricket coach Gordon Greenidge was sacked on Monday on the eve of the Bangladesh-Pakistan match of the World Cup at Northampton. This decision of the BCB boss Saber Hossain Chowdhury taken overseas in the middle of an important tournament and just before 30 days of the expiry of the contract with Gordon has been in bad taste smacking of indiscretion as well. Whatever input has gone into Bangladesh's standing in world cricket today does bear some stamp of Greenidge. Can any one deny that? But you take him to London and keep him till the very end and then suddenly decide to chuck him out at a wrong time and place. You had the better, much civilised option of not renewing his contract on return to Bangladesh. The way Greenidge has been treated only reflects the smallness of the mind of the BCB. This is a disgrace not just done to Greenidge but also to Bangladesh.

Gordon Greenidge returned a hero in 1997 from Kuala Lumpur after Bangladesh won the ICC title and was offered prizes and granted the honorary citizenship of this country. These same people who went gaga over Greenidge cannot even wait a month for a decent exit of the West Indies legend.

Greenidge felt younger people should get more exposure contrary to the Board's approach of a mixture of young and old in the formation of the team. There had been miscommunication between Greenidge and the Board for quite some time. But that should not have been the reason for his sacking in such an uncivil manner.

Since the arrival of the team in England along with a host of Board officials and members the relationship between Greenidge and the Board soured to a new pitch; but why go public with it in such a crude fashion? We strongly feel that the BCB should extend proper respect to a man who is held in high esteem by the fraternity of cricketers.

## Unconvinced about the Site

THE government's initiative to hold a meeting with civic society representatives to clarify its position on the construction of the Bangabandhu Convention Centre at the Osmani Udyan amidst increasing environmentalist activism against it deserves some praise.

However, their efforts to hold on to the designated site have been unconvincing, simply because they are lacking in logic. That the Udyan has been chosen for its proximity to the hotels sounds more like a lame excuse rather than a plausible explanation.

Quite clearly the negative impact the construction may have on the environment was not taken into account during the decision-making process. Felling of trees is not the only point of contention here. Had it been so the Prime Minister's pledge to supplant the trees would have sufficed. It is not merely a matter of replacing one tree at the Udyan with three elsewhere. Environmental considerations apart, as we have pointed out before, the proposed convention centre will pose an added strain on the already over-burdened traffic system. Holding the summit at the heart of a over-crowded commercial hub would be no less than a logistical nightmare. We reiterate our stand against the proposed construction at the Udyan and hope that Tuesday's meeting would lead to a change of heart on the part of the government.

HISTORY in essence being a chronology of events, the political philosophy and institutions in vogue in a country is subject to an evolutionary process that reflects the changing mind and environment of a people. Bangladesh, comparatively being an infant nation, has not witnessed much change in the thought process on this domain. Yet, some of the developments in this field are no less interesting and are worth recounting.

The country, no doubt, has undergone some drastic changes in its political system. Bangladesh was born out of the abyss of a cruel and barbaric rule of a Pakistani military dictator following his defeat in a nine-month long bloody war of liberation. Democracy, in the parliamentary form, was re-established after liberation. But the first post-war Awami League government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman abolished democracy in 1975 by way of disbanding all political parties through a snap amendment to the constitution, and by introducing one-party rule of Baksal. Mujib's assassination a few months later in August by some mid level but largely freedom

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fighter officers of the Army brought back military rule in the country and catapulted the then Army Chief of Staff General Ziaur Rahman as de-facto leader, though under civilian Presidents. The process was briefly interrupted from 3 to 7 November 1971 during the abortive coup attempt of the then Chief of General Staff Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf when Ziaur Rahman was arrested and held in custody.

The restoration of civilian rule and multi-party democracy was done by Zia by holding a parliamentary election in 1977. The process continued through the autocratic rule of General Ershad till after holding the first free and fair general election in the country which led to the formation of a BNP government by Begum Khaleda Zia. It was in her time that through consensus parliamentary form of government supplanted the presidential form. This process under which parliamentary election for a five-year term

## Political and Electoral Reforms

# Time to Ponder Some Personal Reflections



## Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

and indirect election of 30 reserved women seats were provided for, still continues.

The question now arises as to what reforms are needed and how to make them? Let us examine the nature and method of election of members of the parliament as practised now and before. Those of us who had witnessed various elections during the British Raj and also during the Pakistani time have reasons to be satisfied with the nature and method of elections in that period. The elections were generally free and fair and people enthusiastically elected their candidates, nominated by their parties, irrespective of the fact that they were local people

or far-off national leaders. There were hardly much of physical violence and the role of money game was minimal.

Now, we are told that to win an election, at all levels whether parliamentary or various local levels, a candidate has to have plenty, real plenty, of money and has to depend upon a sizeable number of terrorists to bolster his support. There are, indeed, noble and notable exceptions. Consequently, those who have no legitimate money of that substantial figure to spend and who would not like to harbour terrorists would not generally win election. As a result, many candidates who are otherwise highly deserving

do not get a chance and the nation becomes deprived of the wisdom and counsel of such useful people.

There are, indeed, a number of measures that can be taken to curb inroad of such undesirable elements into the parliament. But, appropriate and effective application of such measures present a number of problematic areas. However, introduction of the system of proportional representation in parliamentary election would perhaps help eliminate such problems to a great extent, besides providing fairer representation of people in the legislature.

Under this system, elections are held in groups of constituency instead of individual constituencies separately. Political parties each nominate the same number of candidates as the number of parliamentary seats to be elected under the enlarged constituency and their candidates will win election on the basis of proportion of votes cast in favour of their party. Nobody votes for any individual candidate. And also, more than one seat won by a party in a single constituency is distributed on the basis of serial numbers of its contesting candidates. Under this system, no individual candidate can canvass only for his own candidature; he or she has to canvass for a group of candidates. This system will also ensure that the total number of seats gained in

the parliament by a political party becomes almost proportional to the number of popular votes obtained by that party in the national election. Reserved women seats could then also be allocated on similar basis.

Again, we seem to have established a peculiar political culture of our own under which neither of our two principal political parties, justifiably or not, wish the other party to complete the full 5-year tenure of government. They become impatient and, with action and reaction, conflicts take place. This has resulted in enormous loss of human life and nation's property. Thus, if the tenure of government is reduced to a 4-year period instead of the existing 5, the possibility and intensity of movement for removal of government before completion of tenure would, indeed, be much less. In that event, people's distress and loss would then be minimal.

However, these two issues, namely proportional representation and 4-year tenure of parliament, are of great national significance and deserve deliberations by political parties, the civil society and the general populace. The media can, indeed, play the much desired catalytic role by evolving consensus through their readers and patrons. If a national consensus is reached, such changes in the existing system can be introduced only by agreement of major political parties and also before election, not after.

The author is a former ambassador and presently a member of the BNP's advisory committee.

## Arab Woman MP in Israeli Parliament

# A Catalyst of Change

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

**"I am delighted to be the first Arab woman to enter the Israeli Parliament where I will do my best to represent the interest of Arab citizens and of the Palestinians because I also think of myself as being a Palestinian."**

THE new Israeli 120-seat Parliament brought a quiet revolution as it elected fourteen women and among them is a Arab woman, 41 year old Ms. Husania Jabara. For the first time in history of the State of Israel, an Arab woman is to sit in the Israeli Parliament and Ms. Jabara is proud to represent her people. The result in the election appears to be a manifestation of the maturity of the politically conscious young Israeli people who are born after 1967 Six-Day War.

Ms. Jabara represents the left-wing Meretz party which secured 10 seats, the fourth largest party in the Parliament. The party represents the secular views in a robust manner. Her views are liberal and enlightened and she is totally committed to peace.

She told public radio: "I am delighted to be the first Arab woman to enter the Israeli Parliament where I will do my best to represent the interest of Arab citizens and of the Palestinians because I also think of myself as being a Palestinian." The phrase "Palestinian" is

in my view, as much a political definition as a cultural or ethnic one. It stands for the Arabs who dwell in the biblical land of Palestine or are descendants of people whose origins lie there and who consider themselves dispossessed of that land by the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

In Israel approximately 20 per cent of the inhabitants are non-Jewish and most of them are Arabs who are being dominated by Jews settled from Europe, known as Ashkenazim. Arab voice is hardly heard. The Arab citizens in Israel do not call wish to call Israel a Jewish State but a secular State where various ethnic and religious groups live and Jewish is the religion of the majority of the people. About 700,000 Muslims and 115,000 Christians live in the country. Hebrew is spoken by 66 per cent of the population and 15 per cent speak Arabic.

The Arabs claim that it is a State which is democratic and multi-racial and the population in Israel has many things in common with the neighbouring Arab nations. This

commonality is hardly highlighted in the media and Ms. Jabara wants to make it known in the Parliamentary debates. She holds the view that peace could be achieved sooner if the great divide perceived between the Israeli citizens and the Palestinians is narrowed.

Hard-line Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was swept out of his office on 17 May by an electoral earthquake in the shape of Ehud Barak, Labour Party leader and a former distinguished general of the army. President Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair welcomed the election result. Chairman Arafat was understandably cautious in his remarks on the success of Barak and he wished Barak his best wishes.

Mr. Ehud Barak's great asset appears to be that unlike Netanyahu he does not ideologically believe in biblical land of Israel or greater Israel including the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He is determined to pursue former Labour Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's policies and like Rabin he does not mind surrendering the lands of

the West Bank except Jerusalem provided peace and security are ensured in Israel. Mr. Barak is known to be a pragmatist, although he said that losing parts of Israel would be painful for him.

Today there is no Palestine State and some 1.6 million of people live under Israeli rule in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. In all there are an estimated 4 million Palestinians uprooted from their land and living throughout in the Middle East. The Palestinians have a right to form their own independent State and it is expected that a declaration would be made some time later this year by the Palestinian leadership. (The declaration was postponed on 4 May because of the request made by the western nations and of the possible impact on the Israeli election.)

Ms. Jabara's election would hopefully open a new vista in Israeli politics. It appears the women Parliamentarians would play an important role in shaping Israel's new direction and could act as a catalyst to bring a new perspective on the peace deal.

Ms. Jabara's contribution to the path of peace could be immense in bridging the gap on many complex and contested issues. Furthermore the presence of so many women will add colour and moderation to the debates in the austere and often raucous Israeli Parliament.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Europe, Geneva.

## To the Editor...

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.

## Some pedestrian questions

Sir, Why the current crop of politicians encourage violence and use it indirectly as a cult to achieve their objectives? Godfatherism has become a new and hidden root of politics. This hydra-headed monster is going to ruin us. It has already maimed us. Violence, like a boomerang, is now being internally in the political field. The omen is ominous for the security of the politicians themselves. This stage had to come. Recap as you saw, as the saying goes.

Our homogeneous culture has now many hybrid roots, as in agriculture with patented seeds imported from abroad. Secularism is lurking and pecking from the corners; and the fundamentalists are glaring at it. The showdown would be swift and clear, considering the grossly unequal ratio of supporters on each side. The vast majority of the Muslims will not support secularism, as Islam does not need it. The situation is charged. The political leaders have to speak out loud and clear on this issue and close it for ever, either way. The issue appears to be pushed forward in subtle ways, rather indirectly (testing the ground), but the implications would be far-reaching. The odds are beyond practical applications. Which issue has to be tipped in the bud? Referendum?

Where is the limit to creeping politicisation of non-political institutions, and what are its ramifications in the immediate future? The reformation of the bureaucracy is still confined to seminars and succeeding commissions. It is not coming out of the pages of the reports and reports and reports. What is new left to find out? Then why this musical chair ceremonies regime after regime? The bureaucrats may be allowed to speak out during a series of seminars in each divisional headquarters, as they are suspected to place the spanner between the spokes.

How to reform the morals of the Police? Who will order the cat? The law and order situation is too alarming to leave the whole operation in the hands of the police. At the same time political neutrality has to be maintained. We are experts in

crisis governance. Can we deter history from repeating itself? Terrorism is a loaded time-bomb.

Rights and duties. Looks clear enough when read in print, but the fine balance between the two has been destroyed due to the overwhelming presence in daily life of harts and strikes by the employees and workers at the slightest pretext. What has happened to the sense of duty, and who are suppressing or discouraging it, and why? What the findings of the research studies say on this damaging distortion in the society?

A Husnain  
Dhaka

## Relationship among the political parties

Sir, In 1940s, some leaders of the Congress led by Jhalal Nehru, some leaders of the Muslim League led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah and other leaders of the various political parties attended a very important meeting at Delhi with the Governor General of that time for the discussion of the various political issues of the subcontinent.

One of the leaders of the Congress was insulted by the Governor General at one stage of the meeting and so Jhalal Nehru with his colleagues left the meeting. After that Governor General requested Mr. Jinnah to carry on the meeting. But Mr. Jinnah replied in the negative and said that he couldn't carry on the meeting as because his fellow native of the subcontinent had been insulted. At the same time he walked out from the meeting.

From this incident we might learn a moral lesson. Jhalal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah were from two opposite political parties. They were holding totally different political ideas and thoughts at that time. Nevertheless they didn't forget their own race and colour. In a word they showed their brotherhood and sympathy to each other in spite of being two opposite political parties.

From the above discussion

I'd like to ask the political parties of our country whether we can adopt such a moral lesson in our political environment. If we can adopt such a moral lesson in our political circumstances, then we are bound to be gainers. Our total political situation will be changed. We shall be able to wipe up terrorism, negative and attacking attitudes to others. It will also help us to stop students' violence which is a matter of extreme anxiety for the nation.

I, therefore, would like to request all the political parties of our country: let's adopt the above moral lesson and work for the nation together.

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## Diversionsary movements

Sir, All regimes in all countries resort to diversionsary movements in state propaganda; to take the focus away from the hot issues of the day. The government is now talking about flood relief measures and national education policy. The conical force of the Khulna political leaders 'ceremoniously' surrendering a gang of miscreants within the party has become a debatable issue in the press with the statement of the local PID officer. What is the guarantee the chargesheets would have no loopholes for bailouts later? Why such games are played, and votes sought from voters who are presumed to be imbeciles and will gulp any propaganda? The issue rightly deserved a pungent DS editorial.

The breakdowns in the electric power sector are getting curiouser and curiouser (to quote Lewis). Now the area appears to have shifted to transmission (not plants) accident and breakdowns, with three happening within 24 hours (DS, May 5). The popular government has to provide satisfactory explanation to these mysterious coincidences (which appear to have political abatement from some quarters).

The way the government is handling the 'emergency' situation in the country appears not to be enough, mainly due to heavy politicisation of the services sectors and institutions (the Stock Exchange is a hot background issue). Neutral and honest officials are finding it difficult to discharge their public services without political pressure (I know something of what I am talking about as I was in the civil service years ago).

A Zabr  
Dhaka

## OPINION

# Giving the Union Parishad a Chance

Abu S Azad

Without any criticism of the past or present, we should look for the potentials currently at our disposal to build up our future. We know that the key to accelerate and sustain social development is building up the capacity of the local institutions/bodies and through these institutions, channeling the services to the community and also empowering them with knowledge as well as creating environment for as much self-help as possible. Unlike some countries, we do not have organised community structures at the village level but we have elected local bodies like Union Parishads in the rural areas. Union Parishads UPs have a lot of limitations, but still they can and should play a vital role in social development.

We are not advocating for additional manpower or resources for the Union Parishads, but we are thinking of an effective coordinating role of the UPs in government's ongoing social development efforts and activities. Several formal and non-formal development activities are now going on in each union. A considerable number of workers/staff are assigned in each union to carry out these activities. Most of these efforts are sectoral and without any linkage with one another and therefore not mutually supportive. As a result the desired impact on the community has been insignificant. Here, we want to say that if all these efforts/activities which are nothing, but valuable resources of the union, can be harnessed in an organised and coordinated manner, a lot can happen and sustain. This coordination role can easily be played by the UPs with the support of various heads of the government departments/agencies in each thana. The main theme of this approach is to attain accelerated, equitable and sustainable rural development through the local government institutions and to ensure accountability of the civil servants to the people. An outline to establish this approach is given below:

## Step-1

Each Union Parishad will convene a meeting (first meeting) at the union level which will be participated by all thana level sectoral heads of all government departments/agencies and their respective workers including bank officials working within the union. The main workers/staff are school teachers, ATEOs, health and family welfare workers, DPHE staff, social welfare workers, BRDB workers and agriculture, livestock and fisheries staff and others. NGOs should also be invited to this meeting. In the meeting, the sectoral heads will explain the mandates of their respective departments/agencies and describe how their workers are trying to achieve those. The workers will explain their experiences, both positive and negative ones, and also the support and cooperation required from the people and other department/agencies. Through deliberation and discussion, a more effective method/procedure for each department/agency will emerge including support and cooperation needed from other departments/agencies. The agreed procedures/methods will then be followed by the staff/workers of each department/agency under the guidance of their respective departmental supervisors.

2. The same group will again meet, after two months and review the progress. Any constraint/problem identified should be removed by modifying the procedure or by the intervention of the Union Parishads. Henceforth, the group will meet bi-monthly without any interruption. All meetings will always be held at union level. All parties should take this as a challenge to achieve a breakthrough in our traditional and outmoded strategy for development.

## Step-2

Due to the activities carried out as stated above, it is expected that interactions between the government workers/staff and the people will increase to a great extent and

formation of community level structure will become necessary. A para or a cluster of 25-30 families can constitute a community. The government workers responsible for an area should jointly help form these communities with the help of the UP members concerned. Each community should select a team of 7-11 members of which 60 per cent will be women. This team will be responsible to interact and follow up with the families under its jurisdiction for the intended development, be it health, hygiene, sanitation, water supply, family welfare, education, immunisation, income generation or information dissemination. The respective government workers will meet with each community monthly through meetings organised with the help of the team. At the bi-monthly union coordination meetings, representatives from the community teams should attend and participate in the discussion.

## Step-3

Each sectoral department/agency will train/retrain their workers in the light of the new approach and the changes that may take place. Needs and demands for training from the community will crop up which must be met by the UP with the assistance of the respective sectors. The GoB should mobilise funds for this.

## Step-5

This part is optional. This is about creating a fund in the UP. The source of the fund will be voluntary contribution from the philanthropists. This fund should be used mainly for training the community people to attain self-reliance and also to give interest-free loan to the poor to help in income generation. In addition to this fund, a separate zakat fund may be established in each union to help the destitute following the religious guidelines.

As this process continues regularly, a true people-oriented approach will evolve which can eventually be institutionalised and strengthened.

The writer is an engineer.

## Art Buchwald's COLUMN

# 'Smart' Persons

by Art Buchwald

ENOUGH with the smart bombs," said a high government official in the Pentagon. "What we need instead is smart people."

"What do you mean by smart people?" another official asked.

"Someone who can tell the difference between an anti-aircraft unit and a foreign embassy."

The director of Pentagon research said, "It will take us five years to develop a smart person, and then he has to be tested. I can't give you one overnight."

The top Pentagon man said, "We're at war. Can't you at least find someone who can read an up-to-date map of Belgrade?"

An intelligence officer said, "We don't have any up-to-date maps. We're using the ones put out by Exxon in 1948. If we had to update all the maps we have of the world it would cost us a fortune."

One of the big shots said, "We're in a conflict, and if it takes smart people to win it, I say damn the expense."

The argument went back and forth. The president's man who was sitting in said, "Why don't we trade smart bombs for smart people? I'm sure the Chinese would go for it."

The Pentagon official said, "I wouldn't bother the Chinese right now."

"Is it possible," someone asked, "to drop a smart bomb without a smart person involved?"

The intelligence man said, "It's never been done, though in desperation we might try it."

The president's man said, "We should go ahead with the research to see if we can create a stealth smart person that the enemy can't see."

The Pentagon guy said, "It will take up half our budget. If it will solve our map problem, it'll be worth it."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.