

## Mind Your Words in Parliament

THERE is no earthly reason why Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed felt that much nettled to do the tongue-lashing he did on Tuesday at the Jatiya Sangsad. Equally we are dumbfounded by the unprintable language some BNP MPs used in reaction to Tofail's words. Parliament is no place for tamasha.

It all began when opposition whip and BNP MP Major (Retd) Hafizuddin sought a clarification from the Speaker on a point of Rules of Procedure. He wanted to know from the Chair whether it was in order that the commerce minister had replied to some opposition objections to BTV's coverage of parliamentary proceedings when the State Minister for Information was present in the House. Normally the Rules of Procedure requires the minister concerned to speak on a subject-matter of his or her domain. Tofail Ahmed went overboard in a number of ways. First, Hafizuddin's question was directed to the Speaker not to Mr Tofail, but the latter took it upon himself to injudiciously react to it. This was uncalled for, to begin with. Then, he chose not only to evade direct and specific answer to the question, but what he also obnoxiously did was to advise Hafizuddin to 'teach the Leader of the Opposition Rules of Procedure' because she had recently 'criticised the Speaker outside the parliament'. We have no hesitation in saying that the commerce minister overstepped his limits by dragging the opposition leader's name into the controversy. This was done in a grossly unwarranted fashion betraying a complete lack of respect for the sanctity of her position.

All this is highly regrettable at a time when the opposition have pledged to participate in the budget session, hartals have been scaled down and the Business Advisory Committee's meetings have proved constructive by way of bringing both sides into a positive mental frame. The opposition has looked geared to contain themselves within the four walls of the Jatiya Sangsad. This paper always wants to push forward with a positive trend and demurs at the slightest prospect of any negative chink in it.

Having said that, we shall be failing in our duty if we did not make a final point of the unprintable language the BNP legislators used on the floor of the House in reaction to Tofail Ahmed's insinuating words against the opposition leader. These words hardly did any honour to Begum Zia. Alas, from unparliamentary words we are now down to unprintable words.

## Hail Hippocrates

THE doctors at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital have certainly set a precedent of unflappable dedication to their profession. Their undeterred determination to serve patients in dire need of medical attention may have invited the wrath of the striking employees at the hospital but on another level it has indeed touched the collective sensitivity of the society. In their defiance of extreme intimidation and provocation from the proponents of the work stoppage, revealed was a simple but strong message: for them, patients have the priority, politics does not. By adhering to the Hippocratic oath, they have certainly set an example worthy of emulation by their colleague in similar circumstances.

With an end to the work stoppage enforced by the nurses, cleaners, *ayas* (maids), security guards, etc., looking increasingly elusive, doctors remained the last bastion of hope for patients who had no other option but to suffer. The doctors have lived up to their responsibilities. However, the indifference of the striking workers has already transformed into hostility and the situation may get even worse. If it does, the doctors, valiant they are though, may not be able to continue with their good work.

Here comes the question of immediate government intervention. But unfortunately, there seems to have been no substantive efforts from the health ministry to that end. Varied, and at times contradictory, reports on an abortive attempt to get the strikers to the negotiation table have come out. While some say the striking leaders did not turn up at the health minister's office at the appointed time, others say just the opposite. Whatever the case may have been, a speedy end to the dreary situation at the hospital is imperative and the government should take a meaningful step in that direction. At the same time, striking workers must recognise that their right to protest should not impinge on others' right to work. Their grievances should not, and must not, get in the way of doctors discharging their responsibilities towards patients.

## Muscular Monopoly

THE story of alleged intimidation of rivals by a ruling party MP in old Dhaka has been published in an influential Bangla daily Tuesday.

The report says that the MP has submitted tenders for seven ferryghats (terminals) on the river Buriganga, belonging to the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), for the year 1999-2000. This MP is alleged to be exercising illegal influence and intimidating other tenderers to refrain from submitting their offers for these terminals.

The BIWTA had twice before floated tenders for bids from genuine parties but none except the MP has submitted any offer. The BIWTA have fixed a minimum of Taka 2.5 crore offer for these terminals but each time the MP submits an offer of Taka one crore and none else is allowed to submit any tender he retains the chance of a walk-over. The BIWTA has now floated the tender for the third time and the same situation has arisen with the ruling party MP left to enjoy a monopoly position. This not only forces the BIWTA to face a huge loss but also blocks the future chances of this organisation to get much better offer from genuine parties.

We strongly condemn this high-handedness of the MP and urge the minister concerned to immediately probe the matter. If the charges are found correct, the MP should be prevented from misusing his position in public matters. Let there be open contest as per the rules of the BIWTA so that all parties can participate in the tendering process without fear of intimidation and harassment. The government can do without one more embarrassment.

THE victory of the Bangladesh Cricket Team over Pakistan's at the World Cup match was almost a miracle. Most Bangladeshis who watched the game at Northampton or on television did so with the hope that a respectable batting score against the Pakistani team would have retained their prestige and kept them as well as us happy. Victory over Scotland earlier had earned that prestige for the Bangladesh team. But to win over Pakistan at the World Cup was, indeed, an honour that hardly crossed the mind of many.

The people of Bangladesh were, no doubt, elated. Elated beyond expectation and naturally so. Cricket as a national game made its inroad into our sports culture only in the recent past. During the Pakistan time, all facilities, training and encouragement were confined to West Pakistan. The eastern wing remained neglected in sports as it had been in many other sectors. Even during the period following liberation little attention and patronage were made available to encourage young people to generate interest in cricket.

It is only during the current decade one can say that the authorities realised the promise of Bangladeshi boys in this

sport and through it the prospect of making name and fame for the country.

The people of Bangladesh wanted to accord a befitting reception to their new-found heroes. All people — men, women and children irrespective of their political affiliation — wanted to hold a gorgeous function in which all would participate. Unfortunately, it so happened that a civic reception was arranged by the Mayor of Dhaka city on the parade grounds of Manik Mia Avenue in which opposition leaders became conspicuous by their absence. Why was it so? The reason was simple but ridiculous. The arrangement made was that at that grand reception Prime Minister would be the Chief Guest and only the Mayor, Sports Minister, Chairman of the Cricket Control Board and Captain of the Bangladeshi team would speak.

Was it a proper arrangement for a function to be organised on a national scale? Obviously not. It became merely a partisan function or, at best, a government function. The money that was spent did not belong to

any political party. The government holds the purse string of state coffers and is in a position to spend public money right and left at will. Money has often been spent in the name of

termed a national function. At least, one person, Leader of Opposition in the parliament, should have been invited to speak as a Special Guest. Otherwise, no one expected that she

tatives of a large section of the people will not make a partisan occasion a national one.

It is more so now when support in favour of the opposition political parties has bulged forth considerably and exceeded that for the government party. This has been stated indirectly by the Honble Prime Minister herself. The Prime Minister recently made a statement dismissing the possibility of holding mid-term polls now, saying that she would hold election only when the Awami League will win the election. In other words, she thinks that the Awami League, if an election is held today, will get even less than 37 per cent of votes she had received in 1976 to enable them to form government. It may, therefore, be taken as self-admission of popular confidence and there are instances of resignation of governments faced with a similar situation in other countries. But, we are no other countries. We have our own idiosyncrasies which we refuse to give up under any circumstances. Therefore, absence of representatives of about 63 per



## Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

national purpose, but in actual fact it was used to promote party interest. One could thus scarcely justify the huge and avoidable public expenditure for bringing the team home prematurely and sending it back to England than to wait for a few more days and save sizeable public funds. This was done merely to satisfy the whims and caprices of the rulers.

One has to be candid about the fact that without participation of leaders of opposition political parties, a government function financed out of taxpayers' money cannot be

would have gone there in the audience, just to listen to the Chief Guest and others to speak. This implies that the ruling party did not really want the opposition to be there and wanted to make it their own show. Consequently, the opposition parties had to arrange separate programmes to honour the national heroes. The government had played earlier also such a game of politics in sports by holding a partisan reception on the return of the Bangladeshi cricket team after its having won the ICC trophy.

It is a matter of common sense that absence of represen-

# Life after Mandela

**Mandela began his rule on the crest of a wave of optimism. Mbeki begins his in an economic slump. But few doubt Mbeki's commitment to economic orthodoxy or his desire to root out corruption and incompetence. South Africa's future under Thabo Mbeki may well be unspectacular — neither miraculous nor catastrophic.**

rhetoric.

The New National Party, successor to the National Party that ruled during the heyday of apartheid, claimed about seven per cent of the votes. Seats for the 400-seat Parliament are allocated by a complex formula, taking into account voting on the national and provincial levels. ANC won the most votes in eight of the country's nine provinces, trailing narrowly only in one province which is considered to be a stronghold of the Inkatha Freedom Party.

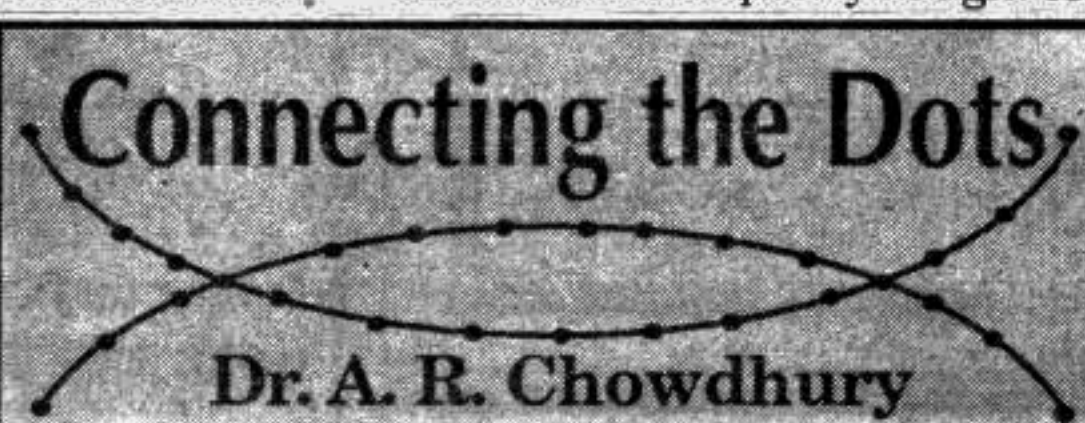
This election has been different from the country's first free election in 1994. Mandela, fresh from almost three decades in an apartheid prison, stood unwavering in his call for racial reconciliation and an end to violence. Electioneering was infused with uplifting rhetoric and the exhilaration of winning a long battle against apartheid. He almost single-handedly kept the country together and allowed the election to go forward.

In contrast, the run-up to this year's national election has been noticeably short on charisma. Much of the tension and the jubilation that was visible during the last election has faded.

Part of Mandela's aura derives from his appeal to an individual's nobler instincts, such as forgiveness and re-

morse. His courage and moral stature set him above reproach. His tactics has always been to use his natural charm to liberate his enemies from their fears. This conciliatory approach has helped him to seduce ordinary whites and blacks.

Against such a record, it would be hard for Thabo Mbeki



to match up. Despite being a man of considerable administrative talents, he lacks not only Mandela's moral authority and widespread admiration, but also his distinctive blend of statesmanship and common touch. His support is almost exclusively among whites and mixed-race population as he is far less solicitous of their concerns than is Mandela. Among blacks, his support is strong but much of that he owes to Mandela and the ANC's substantial coalitions.

A change of style in the administration is possible in the post-Mandela period. However, as far as policy is concerned, no big change is necessarily in store. Matters pertaining to

economic policy making have long been out of Mandela's hands and firmly in those of Mbeki and his economic team. In coming with the new government, Mbeki has been running the government for the last few years.

Mbeki can expect his term as President to be pretty rough. He

are needed to house them all. But the government and private contractors are building less than 10,000 homes each year. After coping with the economic problems, the new government's hardest task will be curbing crime. Tucked inside in the daily newspapers are a daily round-up of violence in the local areas, stories too common to merit much coverage. In recent years, a crime wave has swept the entire country. South Africa has one of the highest incidence of rape, assault and murder among the members of the United Nations. Very few of the criminals are actually caught and punished. Police statistics show that most of the violent crime is carried out by young adults. With these youngsters growing older by the day, an even larger crime wave is just years away unless the government acts fast.

After Mandela's release from prison and election in 1994, apartheid was officially dismantled. But the racial tension in the country still persists. Those racial fault lines have been clearly visible in the recent election campaign. While the ANC was counting on the support of much of the country's black majority, the other 23 per cent of the population have overwhelmingly voted for the opposition parties.

South Africa still treads a delicate path in containing its

cent of people of the country, calculated in a simplistic form, in a function would surely not make it a national one. A golden opportunity was lost for the ruling party and the opposition to be on the same platform to demonstrate national solidarity on a glorious occasion.

There was another opportunity recently missed for a possible government-opposition collaboration. Only a couple of weeks ago, a UNDP-backed seminar on parliamentary affairs was held in which the Leader of House and the Leader of Opposition were invited respectively to inaugurate and close the session. It was a noble venture and all welcomed it. But instead of holding the function in the parliament itself, the inaugural ceremony was held in Prime Minister's Office Complex, where it was done with special invitation to guests instead of issuing one card for all guests to attend both the inaugural and closing sessions. There were a few other anomalies also. These were a perceptible departure from normal practice and perhaps over-enthusiasm of Parliament's Secretariat, it was gathered, contributed to the missing of another opportunity.

The author, a former Ambassador, is a Member of BNP's Advisory Committee.

residual racial tensions. Neither black nor white is about to take up arms to fight for its interests. But each group still, by and large, considers its interests to exclude those of the other.

Mbeki will need to pay at least as much attention as Mandela has done to balancing white fears against black demands for change. But from Mbeki himself, there is unlikely to be much of a radical change in policy.

The country has come a long way since the days of apartheid. Achieving everything Nelson Mandela promised during the 1994 election looked almost impossible back then, and still does. But South Africa's leaders have put in place some of the measures needed to make the country a more prosperous, more stable and less divided place.

Mandela began his rule on the crest of a wave of optimism. Mbeki begins his in an economic slump. But few doubt Mbeki's commitment to economic orthodoxy or his desire to root out corruption and incompetence. South Africa's future under Thabo Mbeki may well be unspectacular — neither miraculous nor catastrophic. When you remember the legacy that apartheid left to the ANC, and the turmoil which so many predicted, that would be no small achievement.

The writer teaches at the Department of Economics, College of Business Administration, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA.

# Why Present Globalisation Policies are Wrong

Arun Ghosh writes from New Delhi

**Competition between unequals is 'unfair competition' and indeed today, it exists only in name. Much of the world output and trade is controlled by a few hundred giant multinational corporations (MNCs). One of the many thrusts of WTO today is not only to open up the markets of developing countries but also to force developing countries to freely allow Mergers and Acquisition.**

tween individual choice and social choice. It was Amartya Sen who, in 1970 (vide Collective Choice and Social Welfare) evolved and reformulated the 'social choice' theory, by focussing on 'personal liberty and rights' of every individual which are quite different from the maximisation of each individual's satisfaction under conditions of Pareto optimality.

We need not go into diverse other aspects of Amartya Sen's contribution but with his elaboration of individual rights and liberty as an integral part in formulation of 'social choice' against 'individual choice' is what we are concerned with.

Let us go to Constitution of India, very ably drawn after long debates in the Constituent Assembly and formally adopted in 1950.

Our Constitution accords not only fundamental right to property (to every individual), it lays special emphasis on 'right to life' and successive Supreme Court decisions have enlarged and elaborated on the concept of 'right to life' as embodying also 'right to livelihood'. Add the special provisions in the Constitution of India on special

treatment to be accorded to the (then and even now backward) Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, to women and children. Add also the whole chapter on 'Directive Principles of State Policy' which virtually lay down economic policy objectives of the State and what emerges? Equity and social justice become part our every individual Indian citizen's Fundamental Rights. Indeed, way back in 1979, in the famous Maneka Gandhi case, the then Chief Justice of Supreme Court himself wrote out the long judgment wherein the 'right to life' was extended (not only for Maneka Gandhi's right to pass, but also to the right to making a livelihood) for every citizen of India.

Obviously, in a country with — even today — 'bonded labour' and children deprived of education, being required to have 10/12 hours a day, individual liberty and individual rights of many people in India are in serious jeopardy. Competition between unequals is 'unfair competition' and indeed today, it exists only in name. Much of the world output and trade is controlled by a few hundred giant

multinational corporations (MNCs). One of the many thrusts of WTO today is not only to open up the markets of developing countries but also to force developing countries to freely allow Mergers and Acquisition. And foreign capital — with its immensely greater clout as compared to the small producer in India — is to be given total freedom to acquire any asset.

This is where there is a wide gulf between the preachings of Amartya Sen — economic adviser to Prime Minister and the economic policies pursued relentlessly by the present Finance Minister, Industry Minister, Commerce Minister. They are all submitting to the dictates of USA, World Bank, WTO in regard to 'opening up' more and more of Indian economy to predatory external capital, to the detriment of the fundamental right to a livelihood for bulk of Indian population.

Despite a fiscal deficit exceeding 7 per cent of GDP, inflation (as measured by wholesale price index) is less than 4 per cent as of writing. People, by and large, have no income; and they have no income because of the increasingly fewer opportunities for

gainful employment in the face of flood of imports, in the face of increasing 'financial integration' which tends to pass on the control over Indian enterprises and India's productive resources to foreigners with greater money power, leading to monopolistic production and retrenchment. Per latest date, India's trade deficit exceeds \$15 billion in 1998-99 and if we still have foreign exchange reserves exceeding \$30b, it is because external capital has been pouring into this country (in the manner it did earlier in this decade to East/Southeast Asian countries).

Southeast Asia is today 'reeling' under the impact of the sudden withdrawal of such capital. In India, to the extent external capital buys up Indian assets, it need not withdraw; it would even prize real estate, in the not-too-distant future.

This is where the present policies of rapid 'globalisation' (under unequal terms) are wrong. And, this is where one observes a total dichotomy between the 'Bharat Ratna' award to Amartya Sen (and his being designated as an adviser extraordinary to the Prime Min-

ister) and his economic philosophy, and the economic policies pursued by the present government. For, be it noted, the present Government has done more to surrender our economic policies to a predatory USA and to its instruments, the WTO, in the space of thirteen months in power, than three previous governments had done over a span of seven years.

In a different context, the ham-handed, illegal, absurd, bombing of Serbia, relentlessly over the past six weeks or more, by US warplanes (supposedly under NATO command but in effect unilaterally, as the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade revealed) illustrates how the USA is focussed on pursuing its own narrow agenda, unmindful of the UN, of the voice of the majority of nations around the world. The same US agenda dominates economic interchanges around the world today, pursued through (again supposed international) institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO.

And, it is in this 'unequal' world that we are globalizing mindlessly, surrendering our economic sovereignty, our cultural values, and justice enshrined in our Constitution. Amartya Sen's economic philosophy is for the birds.

The author is a former member of Indian Planning Commission.

## To the Editor...

### Stranger than fiction!

Sir, The honourable new Chief Justice, according to press reports, had pointed out, during a reception, that the Judiciary wing cannot buy a typewriter or recruit a peon without going through three ministries (for administrative approval and financial sanction). Perhaps the political and bureaucratic masters may like to respond to this juicy bit of information on the administrative and financial powers under a fiercely centralised governance system.

I feel tempted to add an instance from personal experience. When I was posted in the then provincial secretariat (Eden Building) Dhaka, I sent a note to my superior officer proposing the sanction of a couple of Rupees for the purchase

chase of DDT powder for spraying in the store room for preservation of some government technical equipment and spare parts. I got the approval after several months, after the white ants and finished their job! We have a long way to go!

AZ  
Dhaka

### Quite a mess!

Sir, It is becoming a nasty habit of the government to make a mess out of almost everything. I am not trying to undermine the great win of Bangladesh against Pakistan in the World Cup cricket, but the manner in which the government went about the 'half-day' holiday is unexpected. It was announced in the middle of

night without clarification of the off-hours. Also there was no guideline about the most important things like bank-transaction hours, government-office hours, etc.

As a result, many people were taken by surprise as they could not find such details even in the newspapers of that day. Some people even had to suffer. Is this the way to run the affairs of a country?

An Anxious Observer  
hittagong

### Our T&T Department

Sir, With gradual relaxation of our country's import policy to catch up with global open market programme, there has

been significant stress on improvement on scope of better and faster communication allowing business community to be able to contact overseas associates faster and through dependable means. Because of growing importance, communication media is also changing and already changes observed from Telex to Fax, now to e-mail and Internet. To catch up with needs of time, despite all the self-expressed pride of our T&T Department, we find our country is falling behind.

Telephone connections take up to year or more, shifting of a telephone under the same exchange cannot be expected before six months and our over-qualified engineers in T&T can only work on their desk where no engineering skill is required. People have no option but to rely entirely on the

knowledge and skill of the lineman for servicing the operational needs. No engineer comes up for field work leaving their desk and rectify any fault in the system.

In order to move our nation to meet the growing challenges ahead, in the best national interest, our country's decision makers should decide to place T&T under private sector so that new and advanced technology can be used, service improvement can be achieved for competitive reasons, incompetent and corrupt workers can be placed to face the reality of the service demanded. Once such a bold and corrective step is taken it will serve as eye-opener to other sectors like Electricity, DESA, Gas, and hence corruption can be substantially brought under control.

M I Karim  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

### Irregularities and malpractices

Sir, It is a pity that Rajuk Uttara Model School and College is now a centre of unfair means and malpractice with the help of some senior teachers and corrupt employees of Rajuk who have been doing private business using the name of the school for quite some time. As a result, the administration and teaching standard of the school have been gradually declining since 1992.

A R Osman Ali  
Amir Complex, Sector#7  
Uttara, Dhaka.