

Wise Counsel on CHT Accord

PRESIDENT Shahabuddin Ahmed has for the first time shared his thoughts on the CHT peace accord with the nation. While highlighting the concessions contained in the CHT peace accord for reconciliation the President said just as in Northern Ireland where some quarters are opposed to the Good Friday Agreement so have we got elements here who do not see eye to eye with the CHT peace accord. What he obviously means is that dissent happens to be a natural part of the process of peace-making, so that it need not be viewed as any serious impediment to it. In fact, we should not be discouraged by it.

The President is not being subjective with his argument. On the contrary, he has seen the dissent in an objective light suggesting that it does not have to be listlessly acrimonious and unproductive. He argues that the Chittagong Hill Tracts is 5,500 square miles in area with a population of 10 lakhs only, inclusive of both tribals and non-tribals, so that there cannot be any dearth of accommodation for anyone. Only the Land Commission will have to do its job properly and expeditiously to make that possible to the satisfaction of concerned. Secondly, the law passed through the Parliament to establish the CHT Regional Council and the amendments made to the laws on the three Hill District Councils are not the last words. These being 'general laws' can be amended by a simple majority, but such an amendment ought to be the result of a consensus forged in the true spirit of peace-making. Besides, this could help obviate reopening of any settled issue.

So, the President has, in effect, made an appeal to the tribals and the opposition for their cooperation in implementing the peace accord. The tribals need to close their ranks in an impenetrably unified approach to its implementation. The opposition, for their part, should pay heed to the President's independent evaluation on the question marking a departure from the sweeping remarks they have been making about government's alleged sell-out. Let them mentally take a leaf from the pages of peace treaties signed elsewhere in the recent times to rationalise their stance on the CHT accord.

Why This Hartal?

WHEN this paper reaches the readers today, the opposition-sponsored dawn-to-dusk hartal will have been on. This time they are seeking to expedite the ouster of an incompetent, corrupt, fascist and autocratic government which is 'subservient' in terms of protecting the country's independence and sovereignty.

Vague and unfocused as their demand appears, we actually see no logic in this action. 'Hartal' should be a civic protest of 'last resort', which is being used as a protest of the 'first resort'. By taking recourse to hartal too often, we think the opposition is trivialising the very concept of it. Given the country's fragile economy and, more importantly, the pronounced vacillation among opposition leadership on the question of 'issues', this hartal, like the previous ones, is not simply justifiable.

This paper has always questioned the logicality of hartals, especially the way successive opposition parties have gone about it over the years, inflicting inconvenience on the citizens and colossal damage to the economy. The BNP-led alliance, at this point of time, appears to be clinging to anything and everything as a pretext for calling country-wide shutdowns. First it was for the CHT treaty, then for transshipment, then for the removal of the Chief Election Commissioner and now it is for the resignation of this government. Which issue are we to take seriously?

Once again, we would like to reiterate our opposition to hartal. We would like to believe that the socio-economic well-being of the country. However, the course they have taken, confrontational and destructive as it is, does not speak of good intentions. A strategy that benefits neither the people nor the country nor even the proponents themselves is obviously devoid of any virtue. We earnestly hope that the opposition leadership would realise that, renounce politics of hartal, and instead concentrate on issues of public interest.

Congrats to Guenter Grass

WE rejoice in the fact that Guenter Grass has received this year's Nobel Prize for literature. This brilliant German writer has to his credit the resurrection of German literature in the post-war era. The 71-year-old humanist litterateur has lifted the spirit of his nation like the phoenix from the rubbles of Germany. But he is conscious about the devastations wrought by the Nazis and politely apologises for their misdeeds and at the same time takes the rap on the shoulders of Germans. Grass has tried to rejuvenate the whole nation as well as German literature. He is afraid that Germany may stray again and at the same time he is confident that "It can't be that my children and grand-children will have to suffer under the stigma of being German." He has hopes in the future generation and expects that 'these late-born children also have a share of the responsibility for ensuring that such things — even their strings — never happen in Germany again'. The Nobel academy said "The Tin Drum" gave German literature "a new beginning after decades of linguistic and moral destruction".

We are particularly delighted at his success because we have seen this radical humanist from very close quarters when he visited Bangladesh in December 1986. He has done us proud.

We wish him healthy life and continuing creativity.

FOR decades, the United States government has been lecturing the poor nations around the world on what to do and what not to do. We ought to know! Bangladesh has been on the receiving end of such lectures almost since its independence in 1971.

The advice comes free with foreign aid and loans. Of course, small, poor countries — like Bangladesh — that depend on the money borrowed from the United States and other US-backed international organisations don't have the luxury of ignoring its advice. Otherwise, like tycoon dealing with a never-do-well heir, it will cut them off from any future aid.

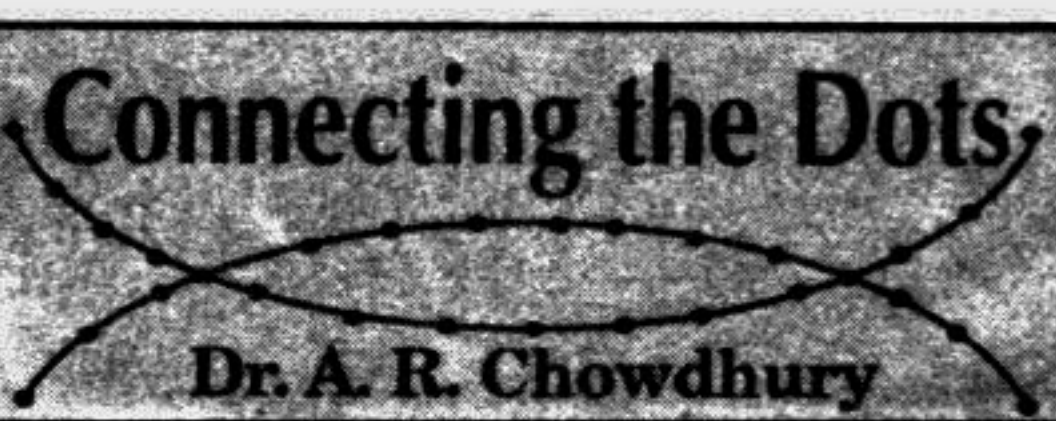
But the question is, does the US government practice what it preaches? At least two recent episodes can point to the hypocritical nature of its behaviour. Take, for example, the case of the IMF. The United States is usually the first to insist that developing countries should toe the IMF line and follow its advice. For reasons known, these countries don't have the luxury of throwing IMF advice into the dumpster. Now, when it comes to the case of the US, does the government follow IMF prescriptions?

Every year IMF Chief Michel

It would be an ugly scar on the face of one of the world's richest nations and one that routinely calls on others to meet their international obligations. The US ought to pay what it owes to the UN. Completely, immediately, and without strings.

Camdessus meets with Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank in the US, and coaches him on interest rate policy. Time and again in recent years, the IMF has asked the Federal Reserve to raise the interest rates in order to control inflation. Time and again, Alan Greenspan has simply nodded politely and, for most part, left interest rates alone. At key junctures over the past few years, the IMF has urged the US monetary authorities to move in one direction and the Federal Reserve Bank has headed in the other.

Last week, a front-page story in *The Wall Street Journal* chronicled instances where the Federal Reserve Bank ignored the advice of the IMF. For example, take July 1997, just weeks after the Thai baht collapsed and eventually led to a full-fledged global financial crisis, the IMF advised the US government to follow a restrictive monetary policy by raising interest rates in order to forestall inflation. The Federal Reserve Bank rejected their counsel and kept interest rates steady for more than a year and half.



sary in the US. Again, the Federal Reserve Bank paid no attention. IMF prescriptions fell on deaf ears. As the article in *The Wall Street Journal* comments, "... Camdessus to Greenspan to trash can". But if US policy makers disregard the IMF's advice so often, why is it usually the first to insist that the poor countries should abide by any directive coming down from the IMF's Washington office? The perception among many US policy makers is that the steps that IMF recommends are almost uniformly bad. Now if IMF can't give sound advice to the US, what hope is there for the poor countries that count on the IMF's steady hand?

Another example of the double standard among US policy makers relate to the payment of its arrears dues to the United Nations.

Nobody much likes deadbeat parents, and nobody should. People who refuse to support the children they conceive are abdicating their moral, familial and financial responsibilities. In its relationship with the United Nations, the US is also a notorious deadbeat, and the abdication of its responsibility

is equally abhorrent. Ever since the mid-1980s, the US has been attaching strings to its UN payments or refusing to pay in full on account of various grievances with the world body. The UN calculates that the US owes the organisation some 1.6 billion dollars in back dues, interest and other assessments.

Withholding the payment of bills is an extremely ineffective — not to say unjust — way for the US or any other country to exercise influence at the UN. The new US envoy at the UN, Richard Holbrooke, is a diplomat of proven ability, but he's not going to have much clout at the UN if the country he represents refuses to pay its bills.

On the contrary, this defiant stinginess generates resentment by nations — many of them much poorer than the US — that do pay what they owe even though they like the US may not like all the decisions the UN makes. The irony is that, even as it continues to renege on its UN payments, the US is calling on

the UN to do more. Last week, in his address to the 45th meeting of the General Assembly, President Clinton urged the world body's member-states to strengthen their ability to prevent the kind of ethnic slaughter that has afflicted far away places like Kosovo and East Timor.

There are faint signs that the US Congress is facing up to its responsibilities. At the urging of the White House, the Senate has voted to send the UN a cheque for 800 million dollars, although several strings are attached to it. The House of Representatives has yet to act on the UN funding bill.

It is neither unusual or unfair for organisations to expel members that, for one reason or another, refuse to pay their dues. Thus, the UN General Assembly would be perfectly within its rights to strip the US of its vote there unless it makes a good-faith payment on what it owes.

But it would be an ugly scar on the face of one of the world's richest nations and one that routinely calls on others to meet their international obligations. The US ought to pay what it owes to the UN. Completely, immediately, and without strings.

India's Last-phase Polls

It is possible that the next parliament will be a hung one, if Congress recovery in the last rounds of the voting proves more than what was anticipated.

STAGGERED general elections in India end today with last of the five-phase voting-casting that began on September 5 last. This possibly would be one of the most acrimonious war of words among leading political figures India. Seldom in the history of independent India an election has been fought with so much mudslinging and calumny. It is partly due to the fact that polls are being held quite frequently and these snap elections are putting tremendous pressure on political parties to score their points over opponents.

Additionally, the mid-term elections cause strain on the economy and result in public apathy towards the political system, and consequently, politicians seek to blame their rivals for the situation. Hence are the allegations and counter-allegations both at political and personal levels. The situation is further aggravated when experienced and elderly public figures are involved in it. The latest one brings three very senior politicians — Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, his senior ministerial colleague Lal Krishna Advani in one hand, and elderly opposition leader and chief minister of the left-ruled West Bengal Jyoti Basu on the other. They are engaged in a controversy which neither is keen to relent.

Mr. Vajpayee has sought apology from Mr. Basu, calling powerful home minister and an influential leader of the ruling BJP Mr. Advani a "criminal" linking his role to

"Babri Mosque" issue. But Mr. Basu has refused to oblige, saying the acts of Mr. Advani warranted this expression. Earlier, ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) leader Mr. Pramod Mahajan of BJP and Mr. George Fernandes of the Samata party — both senior ministers in the current caretaker government — made such remarks against main opposition leader Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. The newspapers termed them "shameful" and beyond an iota of decency. Mr. Mahajan said that if Italian-born Sonia Gandhi can become a leader and prime minister in India, then Ms. Monica Lewinsky could also become the head of government in India. The parallel between the two was drawn obviously centring NDA's constant harping that Ms. Gandhi's foreign origin should not qualify her to adorn high office in India.

Mr. Fernandes had gone a step further, saying Sonia has only one contribution to India — producing two children out of Indian Rajiv Gandhi, her slain husband and former prime minister of India. Some Congress leaders retorted by commenting on the fairness of the "bachelorhood" of PM Vajpayee and insinuated that he may not have a clean personal life. All these were not only of bad taste but also hitting much below the belt which were not seen at this kind of unhealthy magnitude earlier in election

campaign in India. Evidently, nobody in his right mind can approve of this since political issues should have been used to pin down rivals, particularly before the polls. If the Vajpayee government seeks to cash in on the success over the Kargil conflict and opposition alleging that government is unduly trying to extract benefits out of this, it is only a usual practice. Opposition's contention that the government might have also com-

promised security environment of the country to an extent by "ignoring" the "Kargil" crisis during the initial period just to gain electoral benefits. Mr. Vajpayee's denial also forms part of this pattern. The tendency of character assassination has certainly crossed all limits.

In other words, this could be a measurement of the bitterness and the belligerence with which the election is being fought. Today's last round of the polls, however, will decide the fate of two main players — the incumbent prime minister and main challenger Sonia Gandhi. Mr.

Today, all eyes will now be set on the outcome of the elections which will begin to pour in from October 5.

Two main issues of interest, revolving the elections, are evident in opinion polls despite the fact that the opposition called such forecast as mostly designed to influence the voters. Secondly, will Mrs. Sonia Gandhi personally romp home with victories, and if so, whether from both the seats and with margin? That Mr. Vajpayee and most of the prominent leaders are likely to

win is a foregone conclusion; but Mrs. Gandhi's case is different because she is fighting election for the first time and that too in an atmosphere generally believed to be favouring the NDA. More importantly, her own success is linked with the influence of India's most famous political dynasty. She may do well in both seats. It was earlier thought that the NDA, riding the crest of popularity over the "Kargil" issue and some other factors like opposition's failure to form an alternative government following bringing down the Vajpayee government by a single vote in April, would easily secure absolute majority which is more than 273 seats in the 543-seat Lok Sabha.

But the Congress spared no efforts to turn the table on the opponents as time passed in the campaign, and in the process, the difference has been narrowed. Now it is assumed that the NDA will be able to secure a bare majority with around 280 seats whereas its tally was projected as nearly 300 or even more. The BJP, main constituent of the NDA, is expected to remain the single-largest party and it strength may remain more or less the same. The Congress's strength is expected to improve from previous 140 and it allies like AIADMK and Rastriya Janata Dal may secure between 180-190 seats. Some of the allies of

the BJP like the DMK and the TDP — both in the southern India — may get more seats than last elections. If this assessment is broadly right, then it appears that both the main political parties — BJP and Congress — will gain. But at whose expense?

Clearly, the parties outside the two alliances led by two parties will receive a jolt and these, mostly the centrists and leftists, forming the "third force" may suffer by getting around 80 seats from nearly 100. Congress's position will certainly improve in states like UP where it drew a total blank in 1998 but it may suffer badly in Maharashtra. BJP will secure less seats in UP but may gain in the south and also in Bihar. The bastions of leftists in West Bengal and Kerala are likely to remain unaffected but centrist secular Samajwadi Dal and BSP will definitely see their strength coming down in the UP which sends maximum 85 MPs to the Lok Sabha.

However, these are all within the realm of assessments and speculations, based on certain indicators. It is possible that the next parliament will be a hung one, if Congress recovery in the last rounds of the voting proves more than what was anticipated. The NDA could also be comfortably placed by sound majority if the late swing by the main opposition's bid to regain the ground remains less than expected. But an NDA ascendancy seems on the card despite the waning margin.

Nuclear Fears?

Among the many worries that should affect this nation is possible nuclear holocaust and the capacity to deal with it. We must face up to realities sooner rather than later in the face of the knowledge that the geriatric Indian leadership is capable of adventure.

DAY in and day out, some knowledgeable experts both in Pakistan and in India, are holding forth on the stated Indian nuclear doctrine and what the Pakistani response should be. The muted response it has exacted from the west, it is clear that the Indians have not stirred any hornet's nest, on the contrary there seems to be grudging acceptance of the reality that a nation that has five to six times more people below the poverty line than the entire population of Pakistan, will divert enormous resources to become nuclear in an increasingly de-nuclearized world. Unlike for North Korea, there is no hint of India being accorded the "rogue nation" status for holding the world's cynosure in utter contempt.

Part of the fears of an "Islamic bomb" stems from the fundamentalist label accorded to the more conservative Muslims because of the tenacity of Islamists in battle in both the Afghan and later the Chechnyan war, mainly due to their unflinching faith in God and their religion, thus causing them to accept death in battle. Shahadat, as a blessing. The west particularly the US, is apprehensive about their capacity for harm if they should lay their hands on nuclear weapons. Frankly, the likes of motivated Shamyil Basayev, admirable though he is, is enough to scare anyone.

All religions have fundamentalists, the Hindu kind is

not only the most virulent but concentrated in a far smaller area, thereby making escaping attention, but not its potential for lethality. More than in any other religion of the world, its hatred for other religions is only surpassed by its brutal suppression of its own low caste. Such are these people that they could raise an Islamic icon like the Babri mosque to the ground with their bare hands on the plea that many hundreds of years ago a temple to Ram stood in the same given place. Given the fact that the only country in the world has ongoing conflict, whether openly in clandestine fashion, with almost all its neighbours, one can feel concerned about their capacity to do mischief in the region and even beyond to the extent of the range of their missiles. After all, when their stated enemy is Pakistan and it has developed the Prithvi as Pakistan-specific, why is Agni with a far more ballistic capacity, on the launching pad? Not only Pakistan but the entire region (and beyond) has reason to fear India's long-term ambitions to establish hegemony, the west is playing into Indian designs by mouthing barely audible murmurs of protest.

While Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is not difficult to announce, what really matters is that we establish credible controls, in particular the projected Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) with not only adequate checks and balances against both adventurers and madmen but capable of an adequate nuclear response in the face of a possible attack. That credibility will act as the deterrent which can prevent nuclear war, not that one has any great confidence in the ambitions of the geriatrics who presently

hardly show remorse when their own untouchables, like the Dalits, come to grief at the hands of their fanatic followers. In such circumstances, what is being done in military circles can hardly be discussed in newspaper columns but what can be done by civilian authority should not only be discussed but also disseminated with great urgency to all the citizens of their country. At the moment our civilian population

whether planned or even accidental. Such a national plan should first make it mandatory to have adequate bomb shelters capable of withstanding nuclear attack on large population centres. Such bomb shelters may be large enough not only to accommodate people but to be able to house them for an extended period of time against radiation, obviously designed to ward off not only nuclear explosions but also nuclear radiation. There must be stored water as well as adequate sewerage facilities along with independent stand-by electric generation equipment, oxygen making machinery and medical facilities capable of treating nuclear trauma and radiation burns. Obviously a large number of medical and para-medical staff have to know how to deal with the effects of both nuclear blast and subsequent radiation. To conserve water, edible items and other scarce resources, local policing authorities have to be earmarked from the Local Bodies to prevent arson, loot and rioting in the face of scarcity. Local Bodies have to be trained and activated to prevent disaster turning into anarchy.

The fact remains that almost none of our hospitals, except possibly partly the mili-

tary, know how to deal with nuclear radiation burns. Are there any medical teams pre-designated and equipped for any disaster, what to talk about nuclear holocaust? Which of our buildings have nuclear-safe bomb shelters, even the new much-touted "Mera Ghar" scheme has no built-in facility to handle disaster of any kind. Is there any contingency plan to check law and order situation leading to anarchy? For that matter even our Armed Forces have cursory knowledge of Atomic, Biological and Chemical (ABC) warfare, little more than at the rudimentary level. As such a nuclear strike will not create such damage and havoc as the chain reaction of devastation that may trigger off because of lack of knowledge, equipment, training, etc to handle the situation.

Among the many worries that should affect this nation is possible nuclear holocaust and the capacity to deal with it. We must face up to realities sooner rather than later in the face of the knowledge that the geriatric Indian leadership is capable of adventure, at least until the Indian populace finds them out to be the megalomaniacs they are, interested only in perpetuating Hindutva over the region instead of ameliorating the economic misery of their masses. We have not only to keep our guard up so as to act as a deterrent but to be able to save the wounds of the special nuclear kind.

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AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

rule India and on the basis of exit polls in the Indian elections, will continue to do so into the new millennium. These are bitter frustrated old men, forced to compromise their beliefs in allying themselves with regional parties to obtain power. Their hatred for Muslims and to a lesser degree Christians, is based on the many hundred years of rule, first by various Muslim potentates and then by the British monarch. What to talk about the brutal murders of both Muslims and Christians, they

has no any knowledge about the effects and consequences of nuclear war, both immediate and long-term. Our own leaders have not an iota of knowledge of the means to secure and protect against nuclear holocaust, neither how to handle the aftermath of such disaster. And even if they had the knowledge, what about the facilities? In fact, we should immediately incorporate a comprehensive national plan to cope with both natural and man-made disaster, with special emphasis on possible nuclear attack,

Dengue
Sir, My attention has been drawn towards the news item "10 blood sample tested, dengue found in 4" published in the DS on 21 September. I would like to say something about it.

I was the Principal Investigator of the first formal research work aimed at detecting the presence of Dengue & Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever which was a component of ICOWE (Integrated Vector Borne Disease Control Project) project sponsored by WHO/MoH under the care of Directorate General of Health Services of GoB during the period 1996-97. The study, for the first time, detected formally and authentically the presence of dengue in Bangladesh. The study was carried out at Chittagong Medical College Hospital over a number of patients who attended the hospital for febrile illness over a period from September, 1996 through June 1997. In that study it was found that out of

252 cases 35 were positive for dengue test ie 13 per cent of febrile cases were dengue if we want to project the data to the population. The report was duly informed to the appropriate authority at that time. Now the question which is needed to be answered scientifically is how far the extent of Dengue prevalence as well as the magnitude of the public health threat poised by it.

Dengue is a short-lasting viral febrile illness which is caused by the infection of four types of dengue virus viz dengue-1, dengue-2, dengue-3 and dengue-4.

The most important aspect of this disease is not only that the victims are usually children under 15, but emergence and maintenance of sequential dengue viral infection may lead to death.

I was the representative of Bangladesh in the First Consultative Meeting on Dengue

and Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever" at South East Asian Regional Organization of WHO held in New Delhi from 10-13 October 1995 which adopted the country and regional level working plan for the prevention of Dengue & Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever. But later on the follow up was not maintained. I think it should have been pointed out in the news item.

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Our footballers give everything for their clubs. But when they play for the country it is just the opposite. This is very unfortunate.

Now, I would like to ask the officials of the BFF including the manager that if the players had to buy water from outside for ten days, if three players had to share one room, if three goalkeepers had to share two jerseys and also if everything is politicised, how could you expect good performance from them?

Here I would like to mention another inefficiency of the BFF officials. Brazil sent a much weaker team to Dhaka to participate in the Bangabandhu Cup tournament. BFF had no knowledge about the team and paid 12 thousand US dollars.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka 1000

To the Editor...

JU student fast

Sir, I strongly disagree with the statement of Dr. Kamal Hossain reported in the DS of September 28, in which he supported the fast of students at the Jahangirnagar University in protest against the enhancement of admission fees. He is said to have stated that it is the responsibility of the state to bear the educational expenses of its citizens. The Constitution says that the state is to adopt effective measures for extending free and compulsory education to all children "to such stage as may be determined by law."

After years of striving, government has never even remotely approached its goal of providing free primary education to all children. In its present economic condition, free higher education in Bangladesh is a luxury which the nation cannot afford. In fact, I consider that higher education is one of the biggest social injustices in

Bangladesh. Some years ago, a World Bank survey placed Bangladesh near the top in the world for the amount of education budget spent on higher education (72 per cent). Another survey by Dhaka University showed that less than one per cent of the students were from poor families. In spite of their almost entirely free higher education, students are not required to make any contribution to the common good (except MBBS doctors) in return for all they have received.

Professor Amartya Sen, last year's Nobel Prize winner in Economics, stated that the greatest development need of India is compulsory primary education. Let us do everything possible to make it a reality in Bangladesh, even if it means that university students have to share a slightly bit more of the country's poverty burden.

Father R.W. Timm, CSC
Dhaka