The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Thursday, February 10, 2000

Local Polls are not Playthings

THE parliament's malfunctioning and the de-I railment of national politics on to streets are a stab on the back of democracy. The electorate have not got their votes' worth there. This is something we are aware of and have been talking valuably about without any let-up whatsoever.

Unfortunately this has obscured our concern for the inordinately delayed elections to various tiers of the local government system. If the parliamentary dysfunction is a breach of trust with the people it is the syndrome of playing football with the local bodies elections which makes it more of a betrayal. In the latter case, it is not merely democracy that is hurt, development, too, is. The participatory character of both democracy and development is shorn off with the much-vaunted devolu-

tion of powers from the central government on to the local levels going by default.

The Constitution envisages a representative local government system as the underpinning of democracy. To that end the original laws on the subject demanded that elections to each set of the local bodies be held within 180 days of the expiry of their terms. The UP elections were postponed twice to be held in December 1997 in place of February of the same year. What sounds more baneful is the fact that the amended law gives power to change dates through gazette notification. The city corporation elections were also deferred twice, by altogether 270 days. Even so, only the Chittagong Pourashava elections could be staged while elections to three other city corporations had to be kept in abeyance following a court order. The amended Upazilla Act extended the dates by 330 days which too expired on December 27 last. The upazilla polls still remain a far cry. The least said about the village council polls the better.

What all this means is that the office bearers of those local bodies are working well beyond the tenure they were elected for. Greater the delay greater the legal and political complications in

conducting these polls.

Most of the reasons cited for the procrastination are lame excuses. Whichever way you look at it, the real cause behind the immobility is lack of political will. The government must stop viewing it as a political weapon while the opposition appreciated the true value of local polls in national polity.

A Queen amongst US

UEEN Sophia of Spain is not a stranger to Bangladesh, and that she is not, has been amply conveyed to her by the villagers of Surabari in Gazipur. Free from disabling decorum and protocol of a state visit, the Grameen Banksponsored trip helped the queen to strengthen the rapport with the commonality she had built during her 1996 visit to Bangladesh. Spontaneity flowed from both sides as the queen mingled with the villagers without inhibition and the latter looked at the distinguished guest as a person, a woman, a mother and a wife. Her royal stature dissipated in the overwhelming love and affection from her hosts and she was the epitome of graceful concern for them. She had muri (dried rice), plucked a kamranga (Averrhoa Carambola its botanical name) from a wayside tree and engaged in animated exchange with rural women. Queen Sophia's visit to the Ashrayan project in

Gazipur has certainly been a measure of keen interest she evinces in poverty alleviation projects. There, among the inquisitive yet not prying crowd, surfaced the other side of hers that is carefully camouflaged behind her official position. Language was a barrier but it collapsed in the face of genuine respect for her. "Apa, dulabhai koi (Sister, where is our brother-in-law)?" is not a formal exchange and nor it was meant to be. The queen reciprocated the sentiments by equally simple and

affectionate gestures.

Not every day people get the chance to meet the queen of a country. For the people of Surabari, it was surely a chance of a lifetime. On the other hand, we are sure, the queen doesn't always have the chance to come closer to people of a far-flung country. It was a communion of hearts where nationality, religion, sex, race made way for greater feeling of one human being to another.

The Blackmail Boomerang

A N insidious blackmail plan that backfired in Chittagong made a story in the national press on Wednesday. The alleged blackmailer received bullet injury before being apprehended while his two female accomplices were arrested. It all happened within a span of about four hours as two businessmen were abducted near Deedar Market in the evening and taken to a five-storied building in Chandgaon residential area. The two businessmen were forced to strip, be photographed with two women, themselves without clothes, and threatened by the abductors that their photographs would be published and also sent to their families unless the victims paid one hundred and fifty thousand taka as ransom. But these amateur blackmailers allowed the young businessmen to leave the place with the promise of fetching money. All they had to do to deceive the abductors was to leave behind their mobiles and a meagre ten thousand taka as collateral. The culprits hardly thought their preys would outsmart them. The two went straight to the police and sought their help. The police obliged and after a brief but fierce encounter caught three of the blackmailers.

It is obvious that incidence of blackmail has been on the increase, particularly in the port city of Chittagong. There have been many cases in which people either lost their lives or had to pay dearly to stay alive. In this particular case the police acted swiftly to nab the alleged culprits and we congratulate them on their success. Kudos to the businessmen as well who cleverly talked their way out of the abductors' claws to reach the police for assistance. We believe that with such presence of mind on the part of victims and prompt competence by policemen many a blackmail attempt can

perhaps be solved.

President Clinton will Skip Pakistan, or will He?

HE White House announced that President Bill Clinton would be visiting at last the Indian subcontinent in March before his end of the term this year. In the list of countries, India and Bangladesh have been included. The 25th of March has been set for his visit to Bangladesh. With regard to Pakistan, there

has been no decision as yet. The question is: will the President visit Pakistan or

It is believed Pakistan's Chief Executive General Musharraf desperately wants President Clinton to stop, even briefly for a few hours, in Pakistan to provide his military government respectability and legitimacy which it so craves.

The image of the military was tarnished very badly when the Chief Justice together with a Justices of the Supreme Court were sacked because they refused to swear allegiance to the extra-constitutional military government brought about by a military coup. In my view, they were right in refusing to do so. The Justices swore their oaths to protect and defend the Conby Harun ur Rashid

It is unlikely that a President of the US who loudly advocates for human rights and democracy will visit Pakistan, more so in an election year in America. But there is a possibility that President Clinton may halt for a few hours in Pakistan. Why?

stitution. What else could they do other than refusing to the dictates of the unconstitutional government?

The Judiciary is the symbol of individual freedom and dignity in a country. It is the judiciary which protects and preserves the rights of the citizens from the unwarranted and unlawful encroaches from the executive on their rights enshrined in the Constitution. If the judiciary is attacked or undermined, one of the basic structures of a state is gone and the rule of the dictator will prevail. This is an unacceptable proposition at the beginning of

The Chief Executive is reluctant to indicate a timeframe by which he would transfer power to a government elected in a free and fair election. His refusal to indicate the time table of restoring democracy appears to be on the ground that any an-

nounced date will give rise to instability in the country and he is not prepared to accept the

perceived situation.

The Chief Executive has declared that his government will hold elections at the local level some time late this year. He wants to reform the institutional structures of the country so that the people of the country can get a taste of "genuine" democracy. He wishes to clean the society from endemic corruption. In recent days he said to a media that he would never surrender power to corrupt politicians, as Nawaz Sharif or

Benazir Bhutto did. Of course, these are all worthy objectives but given the socio-economic and cultural factors prevailing in Pakistan, it might take a decade at least to transform a country of some 130 million people according to his wish-list. Some take a view that it is impossible to do it in

10 years or so. So what the General is up to? Will he become another Zia-ul Haq in Pakistan's politics? Only time will

In these circumstances, it is unlikely that a President of the US who loudly advocates for human rights and democracy will visit Pakistan, more so in an election year in the US. But there is a possibility that President Clinton may halt for a few hours in Pakistan. Why?

Pakistan is a nuclear power in the whole Islamic world. It has clouts with the Islamic countries. China, one of the great powers, has accepted a visit from General Musharraf. Pakistan is strategically located in an area of instability and source of terrorism. Terrorism is an evil which must be punished and deterred. Terrorism, wherever it occurs and for whatever purpose it is invoked. must be condemned.

The current hijacking drama of an Afghan Ariana plane which landed in Stansted Airport in London is an instance in point. At the time of writing, the innocent 157 passengers and the crew are the hostages of a few terrorists for three days. This hijacking comes only after five weeks af ter the Indian government capitulated to the demands of the terrorists who seized an Indian Airlines flight on Christmas

There is a speculation that General Musharaff has offered to cooperate in trying to arrest number one terrorist in US's list, Osama bin Laden, the fugitive who the US believes was responsible for terrorist bomb attacks on US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam in 1998. Osama is hiding in Alghanistan and only the Tal-Iban regime can arrest and

Eve from Kathmandu to New

hand over to Pakistan. Taliban regime is not happy with Osama bin Laden as the UN has imposed sanctions on Afghanistan on that account.

This speculation appears to lend some substance by a media report that General Musharraf will visit Afghanistan "very soon". Pakistan is one of the only three countries (the other two-Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirate) which recognises the Taliban regime. If General Musharraf can achieve the miracle, he will kill two birds in one stone. One will be to facilitate the visit of President Clinton to Pakistan and the second the Indian allegation that Pakistan is a terrorist state will have no credibility. At the same time, President Clinton will stand taller in the US because the US was able to arrest and try Osama bin Laden for his alleged crimes. This appears to be a classic example of "win-win situation" for both

The author, a Barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Europe.

Developments in Pakistan Increase Pressure on its Military Rulers

community is concerned.

INCE Pakistan's October 12 by ASM Nurunnabi coup last year, the West and

Pakistan's regional allies adopted a "wait-and-see' atti-If actions are believed to be a better indicator of a man's intent than his words, General Musharraf tude. They have given the milidoes not seem to have any plan to slacken his grip on power. Rather he seems to be back-pedalling tary government of General on his promises, which might prove disastrous as far as Pakistan's standing in the international Pervez Musharraf time to implement reforms and benefit of the doubt over its commitment to a return to civilian rule. Now, the international community seemed to be getting impatient with the lack of movement on both the domestic and the foreign policy fronts.

To international observers, one reason is that Indo-Pakistan relations are at a boiling point after the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane last December by Kashmiri militants. The five hijackers, members of the extremist group Harkat ul Mujahedin, got away scot-free. Now, say diplomatic sources, the US and Europe are pressing Pakistan to crack down on terrorist groups based in Pakistan and to ban Harkat.

It was felt that if Musharraf expected sympathy during his January 17-18 visit to Pakistan's long-time ally China, he must be disappointed. Although he came away with a deal on rescheduling loans and a reiteration of close ties, Beijing has its own concerns. It seemed to be nervous that the Kashmir insurgency is getting out of hand, while escalating Indo-Pakistan tensions bode ill for the region. Further pressure on Musharraf is felt to be continuing. At stake was the resump-

tion of International Monetary Fund and World Bank loans, which are critical for Pakistan's economic revival. The possibility of a visit to Pakistan in course of US President Bill Clinton's travel to South Asia at the end of March has become uncertain. Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan veremoval as judges. hemently oppose any concession to the US. The Islamic par-

Ban Treaty. The Pakistani public also is growing impatient. Economic reforms are stalled, inflation is rising and there is no sign of restructuring collapsed state institutions. Musharraf, despite his liberal credentials, is said to be hemmed in by conflicting political pressures, an unclear foreign policy agenda and growing neo-fundamentalist groups in the army.

ties and some retired generals

have called Pakistani Foreign

traitor" for promoting the sign-

ing of the Comprehensive Test

Minister Abdul Satter

The biggest challenge to date to the military's rule came lately when seven Supreme fresh oath of office, defying an

order issued by Pakistan's army ruler General Musharraf The army general ordered scores of judges to be sworn in again, this time under a provisional constitution that protects the military against legal action. The refusal of the seven judges meant their automatic

The removal of the Chief Justice and six other judges of the Supreme Court has widely been seen as a blatant clampdown on the country's judiciary. A spokesman of the US State Department has described the move as a step backward, which contradicts the General's earlier promise that he would lead Pakistan back to civilian rule as early as possible. The timing of the regime's crackdown on the judiciary may also have been an indication of its real intentions — the judges were asked to take fresh loyalty oath when a case challenging the military take-over was about to be heard.

In the opinion of some observers, the crackdown on the judiciary is self-defeating and may he termed a blunder com-Court judges refused to take a mitted by the military regime. In their opinion, by doing what

it has done, the regime has exposed its autocratic character which may lend further credence to the popular fear that it is up to something more than presiding over a transition to another civilian government.

However, there have been several legal incidents in recent weeks. The Supreme Court and provincial High Courts have entertained petitions from ousted politicians, who challenged army rule. The Shariat Court ruled that Pakistan's banking system was against the tenets of Islam and ordered the army government to impose a new system. A few weeks ago, High Court Judge Shabir Ahmed refused to hear the criminal case of highjacking in southern Karachi against Sharif to protest the presence of intelligence agents and paramilitary soldiers in his courtroom.

The last time Pakistan's judges were asked to retake their oath of office under a provisional constitution was during the rule of Gen Mohammad Ziaul Huq, Pakistan's previous military ruler. Zia ruled with an iron hand for 11 years until Musharraf, able supported by his death in a mysterious plane

crash in 1988. The crackdown on Pakistan's judiciary by General Musharraf has, for understandable reasons, invited carping criticism for not only the human rights groups but also the governments of a number of countries including the United States. The criticism has been evoked by the fact that independence of the judiciary is essentially linked to upholding of human rights and the constitutional order. If actions are believed to be a better indicator of a man's intent than his

words, General Musharraf does not seem to have any plan to slacken his grip on power Rather he seems to be back-pedalling on his promises, which might prove disastrous as far as Pakistan's standing in the international community is concerned. It may be worthwhile to take note of some of the factors that led to coup on October last year. The coup was triggered by Prime Minister Sharif's fateful deci-

sion to dismiss Gen Musharraf

as Chief of Army Staff when he

was away from the country. Gen

his Chief of General Staff, Gen

Aziz was, however, able to pre-

vent the Prime Minister and defeat his plan to have an army chief of his choice.

According to available press reports, Gen Aziz, a Musharraf loyalist, got the inkling of the order dismissing Musharraf on the morning of 12 October. That gave him sufficient time to put in action the contingency plan which must have been readily available in Pakistan Army tradition to topple the government by the time the order was published in the afternoon.

Gen Musharraf had been Sharif's favourite when the latter fired Gen Jehangir Karamat two years ago. The Prime Minister eagerly picked the apparently innocuous Musharraf least sensing that the latter would be his nemesis later. With love's labour lost between the two - the Prime Minister and Gen Musharraf - since retreat from Kargil, a parting of the way loomed for some time. With the Prime Minister drifting away from Kargil commitment and the Chief of Army Staff at least morally clinging to it, a clash between the two became inevitable on vital security matters. But no one anticipated it to come out in the open and taking an ugly shape. But Sharif's overconfidence duly bolstered by his dismissal earlier of Karamat became a catalyst also in sacking Gen Musharraf and precipitated the crisis leading to Sharif's overthrow.

This was how a political analyst viewed the situation in Pakistan.

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.

PSA and a possible way out

Sir. The Law and order situation is going from bad to worse. Something should be done. The PSA, as proposed recently, is not bad by itself. But in the hand of an already absolute corrupt force (and an incompetent bureaucracy) we are horrified at the prospect. One possible improvement will be the provision of bail with condition of daily reporting to a specified officer. The officer will be prevented from milking the offending cow by weekly or fortnightly reporting the matter to the trial court Let a legal expert provide neces sary refinement to the pro-

A Concerned Citizen Dhaka - 1205

Minimum for the majority?

Sir, The world at large is in the spirit of advancement of science and technology. Now, from the palm of our hand, we send words around the world, we cure diseases, we can destroy cities with a single

In his Abroad and At Home captioned opinion in the New York Times of January 26, Anthony Lewis observes: "... there has been one transforming change over the thousand years. It is the adoption of scientific method: the commitment to experiment, to test every hypothesis (ideas)". He goes on to say: "It is open mind, the willingness in all aspects of life to consider possibilities other than the received truth. It is open to reason." Obviously it is the good

In the backdrop of this development, there are human beings all over the world who are relentlessly tortured, debilitated and more than hundred million people were killed on political reason. There are also 'reasons' for the makers of democratic principle a farce through enactment of draconian Public Safety Act and vowing to en-

force it ruthlessly. Thus the world did not have all the glittering gold with the advancement of science and technology. Presently, as in the past, the world has darkest human instincts at work in the form of destructions of mankind for calamitous reasons arising out of ethnocity, religiosity and variety of other ideals that are not simply tolerated. If there is nothing else, surely we have our

questionable ideals and disagreements as grounds of mutual intolerance culminating in hatred that leads to bloodshed. Resultantly, we have seen the two world wars, the Korean war, three Indo-Pak wars, savagery in Cambodia, Bosnia, Bangladesh, Chechnya and Rwanda, East Timor etc.

Societies, century after century, will have to bear the burden of atrocities on their conscience as perpetrated by one human group on the other. Even when there is no differentiation in a given cohesive society the bogey of "pro and anti" is discovered and pursued relentlessly to the detriment of the healthy growth and even the existence of a society. In doing so, we tend to keep our eyes closed from what we do to harm others. We do not want to know the disastrous effect of our harmful acts on opponents in particular and the society at large. We shut our mind and assume that through our acts we are ensuring our peace of

In reality, it is not so and in Chittagong. the core of our heart we know it is not giving us the peace we so ardently seek for ourselves. Yet the quest for determining right and constructive or wrong and destructive reasons, we plan our course of action and implement it with zeal. Whatever reason we have for our action there is no escape from human responsibility. In the process 'science and technology' is used for the welfare of the people or their destruction. In the developing world, 'science and technology' is mostly used for the benefit of the few and used least for the welfare of the most.

Syed Waliullah Dhaka-1207

Blame it on women

Sir. We are astounded by the report 'Hazari's anti-thesis' published in The Daily Star on January 26, 2000. What Joynal Abedin Hazari, an Awami League MP said in the JS on January 25, 2000 about Badhan, the young girl assaulted at the Dhaka University campus on the night of 31st December, is most objectionable.

Mr Hajari said, "How could a Muslim woman go for an outing in the dead of the night during the month of Ramdan? Was it wrong that the drunk young men jumped on the lady who was dancing on the street with half of her body exposed?... It was only natural that she was treated this way."

We resent this sort of remark and protest it vehemently. And, as for Mr. Hazari's information - the young girl did not go to a jungle where ferocious beasts were roaming, rather she went to the university campus where one would naturally expect to be in the midst of civilised persons, not sex maniacs. Also, the victim was not 'dancing half naked' as Mr Hazari had said but she was being stripped by the, in Mr Hazari's words

drunk youngmen. In our religion drinking alcohol is considered to be a grave offence and looked upon as a sin. So those youngmen who not only drank in the month of Ramadan but went out in a drunken state should had been arrested and punished for that offence alone, even if they were not guilty of harassing a young woman. We are outraged that an MP of the ruling party did not consider the matter from this angle but only gave 'Fatwas' or how a woman should behave.

Women in our country have always been the victims of gross injustice. But when new 'Fatwas' are ushered from the JS and that too by the MP of the democratically elected government whose leader is a woman the meagre hope of getting justice for all the suppression and oppression against women van ishes into the thin air.

Nur Jahan

"A Splendid

Convergence" Sir. My attention has been drawn to the above captioned letter from one Mr Abul Ashraf Noor of Uttara, Dhaka, published in your esteemed daily of February, 2000, wherein he has stated that the word, "Convergence" is not found in the English dictionary. I can only wonder which English dictionary he consults when he confronts a new word. Also I am equally surprised at how such a wrong rejoinder to your fine editorial comment has escaped your attention and was allowed to be printed in your Letters Column.

However, I would like to advise the concerned letter writer that he should look up Chambers dictionary, edited by Willam Geddie, MA, B.Sc. and published by W&R Chambers Ltd. Edinburgh and London. There the word in question appears at page 230 adequately conveying the meaning of the

Masoudul Hossain Khan 105 New DOHS, Mohakhali Dhaka-1206.

Transhipment facility

Sir, It is wonderful to see that at last Bangladesh and India are cooperating for the development of the region. With the transhipment facility, both the countries and their people are going to have economic gains, no matter how much. The attitude of the opposition is only to gain power. We don't want the politics that put obstacle on the progress of these two

countries. We should not forget that during undivided India, the industries in W. Bengal flourished by getting raw material from the then East Bengal. Why can't we increase our cooperation through this facility?

Bimal Krishna Kundu 15. Harrison Ave. Apt # 6a Amityville NY11701, USA

Arsenic contamination and water purifying pump machine

Sir. The sufferings of millions of our people especially those living in rural areas of northern Bengal know no bound due to arsenic contamination of drinking water.

The authorities concerned though made a hue and cry over it, but unfortunately they have not come up with any pragmatic and practical steps and specific remedy this contamination.

We've heard that a water pu rifying pump machine is available in USA, which purifies 24,000 liters of river water per hour. Can't we import this pump machine and use it in the arsenic contaminated areas?

Would the US embassy in Dhaka and our Ministry of LGRD kindly enlighten us about the prospect and utility of the water purifying pump machine?

O H Kabir Hare Street, Wari Dhaka-1203

Good for the

country

Sir, I'm Khaing Sabe. I'm 13 years old and I'm from Myanmar. One thing I like about Bangladesh is that there are many garments factories. It's good because women are able to work there and these factories help improve the country's economy as well. Many a times while I'm in my car, I look outside the window and see a group of Bengali women walking home from work, wearing their colourful saris along with their shimmering jewelry. I think all should respect these women and their contributions toward their family and the country. They are entitled to their rights and the men can't just keep them trapped at home working from dawn till midnight.

Khaing Sabe Grade 8 AIS/ D

OPINION

Get Down to the Routine Level

A M M Aabad

N management, there is something called silent effi-Lciency. Work seems to get done gone smoothly and effortlessly. The whole processing system or circuit works with minimum expenditure of energy; as most of the operations have been brought down to the routine level, and is repetitive. The job may entail the issue of a document, or to provide a service at a counter.

It is immaterial whether this service is being provided in the public or private sector. The principles of the qualities of leadership are the same any where, for any assignment, whether it be in the armed forces, in the business and commercial sector, the secretariat, the leadership of a country, or running a small business agency. While the approach is the same — to provide fast and quality service or output - the technical detail may differ in the assignment of the work.

Therefore a senior executive can run almost any type of office, once the basic principles of management are known and have been practised for some years, which is otherwise known as experience. Frequently, specialisation is confused with management. A managing director or a prime minister employ similar decision-making processes. A head need not be an expert in several fields to run the show, because expert analysis and advice are available to him from his

There is the well-known story circulated some decades back in the UK of an accounts chief from a multinational chemical company being brought in to head a large automobile manufacturing company, as the latter had gone into the red. Within two years the car company was again making profit. The problem was not the quality of the vehicles, but weaknesses in the accounts and marketing sections of this large exporting firm.

Habit is a labour-saving device which is practised intuitively at the human level, at home and at the place of work. Boredom is reduced, energy is conserved, and repetition semiautomatically wrinkles out the procedure to the level of smoothness. But for technical operations, scientific studies are necessary, as, frequently, commonsense cannot provide all the knowledge and the answers. That is why there are so many diverse types of academic disciplines.

For example, in the factories, the Time-Motion Study (TMS) is a very useful tool to shave off minutes and seconds

from specific small operations in the mass production chain. This principle could also be used in the garment incustry, to produce a shirt in 18 minutes instead of in 23 minutes — the cost saving in a lot of 100,000 shirts is enormous (lower system loss). Similar principle could be applied in the bill collection department; or in improving a product or service. Providing good service is more difficult, as human factors are involved; and one human segment is the customers who are outsiders and beyond the control of the sellers. That is why there is a hyperbolic motto The

customer is always right.' One is the technical side, and the other the human factor. In the developing countries the workers have to be trained to improve the human efficiency, in addition to the efficiency factor of the machines (say, electric power generation, transmission, distribution). Simply training is not enough; as there are other unpredictable human factors, such as lack or motivation, and corrupt practices. Good teamwork can greatly reduce system loss; this is vital while implementing big projects of the clients, at home or abroad.

A trained worker saves a lot

of time and energy, not only his own, but that of the others in the chain. The strength of a chain is equal to the strength of the weakest link; as that is where the trouble would first occur. This brings in job categorisation, and further knowledge and training (the pyramid model). The first job of a new manager or in a new office is to bring the different kinds of jobs down to the routine level; and then look for improvements. and raising the efficiency. There are routine problems and unforeseen problems. A section cannot run from crisis to crisis. Technical problems are not reactive, as humans are, and ultimately it is easier to handle machinery than the staff. Human beings are unpredictable in their reactions. This is eliminated to a large extent through training courses, inculcation of discipline, and job motivation. Still there might be human frictions, isolated or sporadic.

Managers have to double as

psychologists to read the human nature during office hours. Since a person has to earn his living, he has to work under another's control. Those who are self-employed have to be good managers to run their own office or business. Management is not a mystique like the femment is debugged, it runs faithfully, to a great extent.