

LOWING hot and cold in politics is bad enough but it is dangerous in uneasy situations. Things go out of hand. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has said that "there are certain elements bent on destroying peace in India." He has even gone to the extent of naming them: "It is none other than Pakistan." He has also said that Pakistan is behind the Laskar-e-Toiba which has threatened to attack his office. Such charges are hurled when a country is approaching war, not coining peace. If they are correct and Islamabad is seen as a saboteur, how long will the ceasefire hold good and of what use is it even if it does? Pakistan has denied that it had anything to do with the Red Fort incident, where three persons died in the firing by militants. Islamabad has also denied its involvement in the Laskar-e-Toiba threat. But if New Delhi's perception is that Islamabad is in any way connected with the incidents, how can the two countries reach any understanding, much less conciliation even if the talks take place? Even though, belatedly, Islamabad has denied its hand in the Laskar-e-Toiba threat, there is no denunciation of its threat to Vajpayee. Assuming Islamabad has no control over the outfit, it should have at least condemned the Laskar-e-Toiba which flouts its headquarters in Pakistan. This is no response of a country from whose soil the threat has come. A ceasefire does not mean stopping guns alone. It means a change in the mindset. It paves the way for better atmosphere. People begin

to look for normalcy. Pakistan's initiative to stop firing at the Line of Control (LoC) and thinning of troops from there was a positive step. Indeed, peace prevails now. But General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's Chief Executive, should have followed Vajpayee's example: announcing a ceasefire, forthrightly and categorically. It would have had a dramatic effect. Musharraf was all prepared for it when I met him at Islamabad some six months ago. But then he fell silent.

Probably, Musharraf had a second thought because of the fundamentalists' opposition. It is apparent that he tends to lean on them in the absence of any political support. Vajpayee faces no less pressure from his Hindutva families. Still he has shown the courage. It shows that the Prime Minister has realised that a ceasefire may set into motion a process which may end senseless violence and force Islamabad to respond.

Musharraf could have turned the tables on India by announcing an overall pause in training, arming and pushing the militants into Jammu and Kashmir. Probably, he believes that he can edge out New Delhi to position from where it may find it difficult to retrieve itself. This will amount to tactics, not a desire to bury the hatchet.

Stop Blowing Hot and Cold

The situation in India can be really dangerous because our fundamentalists are not from one religion. Those among the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians would destroy everything meaningful in India if they were to have their way. This is all the more reason why the relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad must normalise. The hostility between the two communities and the countries can set on fire the entire region.

That the cross-border militancy has decreased indicates Pakistan's graded response. But a complete stoppage would have been better. The cross-border militancy has been rationalised by its envoy in New Delhi in a TV interview. He has explained that

terms but never mentions the militant organisations by name. There is always a feeling Pakistan is equivocal in its replies.

The White Paper on the ISI activities, which Home Minister L K Advani promised to publish would have corroborated the

process in the military began within a few years of Pakistan's creation. The Rawalpindi conspiracy case was an attempt by fanatic military officers the first in a series of many which were to follow who believed in their own religious order and their apparent holy duty to overthrow an elected government and rule in its stead. This was their way to punish the liberals. Once Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz was also tried for 'conspiracy'. One editor of a Pakistani daily told me at Lahore that if the 10 million people in Afghanistan could destabilise 150 million in Pakistan, it was a matter of time before the two together would pose a danger to India. The situation in our country can be really dangerous because our fundamentalists are not from one religion. Those among the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians would destroy everything meaningful in India if they were to have their way. This is all the more reason why the relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad must normalise. The hostility between the two communities and the countries can set on fire the entire region.

People should sense the danger and pull all their weight on the side of peace. Sometimes, I feel that liberals in Pakistan should be more articulate than they are now. At least, they should speak out because the present opportunity may not come for a long time to come. And it is anybody's guess what can happen once the peace efforts fail.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

"some people were getting so worked up over violations of human rights in Kashmir" that they go out of control and cross over. Though not a convincing defence, it is still an admission of sorts. What he wanted to convey was that all militants were not under Islamabad's control.

Could the Red Fort incident and the Laskar's threat be the handiwork of those militants who were beyond the pale of Pakistan? Were Musharraf to say so, he would sound more convincing and more credible. This admission would have gone down well not only in India but also in the world. It would have shown his helplessness, not a deliberate support. But is a supposition correct? Islamabad condemns terrorism in general

extent of Pakistan's involvement. Even after one and a half years of his promise, there is no sign of the White Paper. Do we know too less to make a convincing case or do we know too much to make Pakistan suspect that India has authentic sources of information?

Whatever the truth, people are wary on both sides. They have felt relieved that the two countries are groping towards peace. On their part, they want a settlement so that they can go about their business in a normal way, something which has eluded them since partition. There is also a desire for joint ventures and inter-country trade and business. But that has a long way to go.

National Election 2001

Will Not Black Money Take a Winning Role?

by A R Shamsul Islam

Rightly, the black money can work wonders in Bangladesh. It can purchase, in no mean measure, almost all the ingredients of an election right from party nominations, party activists, goons, guns down to the grassroots voters. Even some sections of the mass media and corrupt election personnel can be lured to sell their services to the political racketeers.

THOUGH not a foolproof system, democracy is till now admitted to be the best available contrivance to provide for the welfare of the people. And election is an indispensable factor of democracy. Bangladesh which has a distressing experience of military and quasi-military rules for a greater chunk of its tenure of independence can now rightly boast of enjoying constitutional and duly elected governments for the last ten years at a stretch since 1991 following the downfall of military dictator H.M. Ershad. Of an otherwise not a quite bright political landscape of this period of constitutional rule probably the most significant achievement is that the political parties of our country are slowly coming to realise that the days of seizing power by street agitations and other unconstitutional means are gone.

It is said that democracy is established through trials and errors spread over an appreciable length of time and we seem to have started learning the primary lessons of democracy over the years of uninterrupted constitutional rule of the last decade.

The wind of the general election, due to be held by October 2001, started to blow a few months back. Both the ruling and chief opposition parties seemed to have concentrated on ship-shaping their respective houses and updating election strategies. The Awami League Chief sent teams of veteran Chhatra League Leaders to different districts to survey the position and activity of the party reportedly ridden by internal feuds in some units. They sub-

mitted reports to the chairperson on the basis of spot verification. There was a spurt of holding public meetings across the country by the AL in which public were wooed to vote the party in the coming national election.

The main opposition BNP Chief Khaleda Zia started a tour of preliminary election campaign across the country on different legs. Her hustings were indeed gathering momentum.

The Jatiya Party Chief H. M. Ershad also launched an election preparation tour mainly of northern districts that he considered his power base.

Meanwhile the flurry of these sorts of preliminary election campaign of the Jatiya Party (E) and the BNP, chief components of the four-party opposition alliance, got somewhat ruffled by what may be called the controversies centering round the higher judiciary. Leakage of the cassette of the alleged conversation between Ershad and a High Court judge, midnight sitting of a High Court Bench granting anticipatory bail to an editor of a daily accused of sedition, the resignation of a Justice of the High Court, the remarks of a former judge of the High Court on judiciary and judges, the High Court's issuing a rule on five national dailies for publishing an alleged cassette version, the High Court's issuing another rule on a

former Justice for alleged derogatory remarks etc made the political atmosphere tense and put judiciary under pressure. To cap all these confusions and tremors came the verdict of the Supreme Court confirming Ershad's jail, though reducing it, and a fine of Tk 5.40 crore on the infamous Janata Tower case.

In the past the industrialists, business magnates contributed to the coffers of the political parties to help them perform their activities including elections. The donors met this obligation considering that as citizens, particularly well-off citizens, they had to discharge some duties and responsibilities for the welfare of the state. They hoped that if efficient political parties were returned to power the country would be better governed and they would be able to freely pursue their trade and commerce.

In general they did not consider that they were possessed of merit and knack to lead the country politically. They remained content that their gesture of good will to the political parties would be fairly reciprocated by the latter as they formed the government. Their trade and business interests would be reasonably safeguarded.

But by now things have changed a lot. Instead of supporting the candidates the

industrialists themselves have turned candidates for the elections by procuring and purchasing party tickets often at high prices. They are no fool to realise that nothing can so securely promote their trade interest as themselves being the people's representatives. That is why so many industrialists have now become law-makers. Of course, it is the qualitative deterioration of the MPs that has emboldened them to aspire for that high pedestal.

How very unfortunate is that in assigning nominations as for high as parliamentary elections as integrity of character, education, patriotism, party allegiance, demeanour etc, which are expected to be counted as vital requirements of a candidate, are found to have been grossly ignored by the high commands of the political parties. In many cases the party chiefs are alleged to have given nomination on the basis of how much money a candidate can spend in his election and more importantly, make donations to the party fund.

The depressed humanity of Bangladesh has long been crying for economic emancipation. It fondly cherished the hope that the governments would render the downtrodden free from social, political and economic oppression. People voted this political party and that to power

time and again. But unfortunately no one came to their rescue. All the governments of different parties and descriptions have retained the same economic system coercive and corrupt. The electors are in a quandary as to how and where to find out an escape route. Their lies the crux of the problem.

This is not true that the politicians of Bangladesh are short of realising this problem. The difficulty is that being beneficiaries of the rotten economic system they cannot move to disturb, let alone destroy it. The emergence, in increasing number, of industrialists-turned-politicians has contributed to worsening and perpetrating that instrument of economic oppression. It is no wonder that this newly induced group will go all the way to tighten their hold on election results. Being a self-seeking class they cannot let elections slip out of their grasp.

In the last decade the nation participated in two national elections in 1991 and 1996. These were acclaimed as quite free and fair elections though the influx of black money in both of them was not insignificant. In 1996 election, compared to that of 1991, greater number of alleged black money makers were returned to the parliament. This reflects that they were con-

vinced that in order to retain that old, corrupt economic apparatus they were to capture the government. This urge among them has now surely become stiffer. So they will undoubtedly enrage their efforts to maul and master the ensuing polls of 2001.

Rightly, the black money can work wonders in Bangladesh. It can purchase, in no mean measure, almost all the ingredients of an election right from party nominations, party activists, goons, guns down to the grassroots voters. Even some sections of the mass media and corrupt election personnel can be lured to sell their services to the political racketeers.

By now black money has polluted enough of the institution of election. It will not stop till the latter is completely destroyed and made wholly subservient to its (black money's) command. The demon of black money is all out to capture and control the government and further the country. To achieve this it will not mind to destroy other institutions including the higher judiciary, the last resort of the people. Penetrating through the elections it is stretching out its tentacles to other institutions of the country by fixing in the key positions of various organisations its lackeys who are hell-bent upon corrupting men of all tiers of the society. Nothing can probably do the nation a greater harm. In fact, the process of turning the nation morally corrupt is in top gear.

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Illegal Immigrants : Can They be Called 'Illegal' ?

by Harun ur Rashid

THE drowning of at least 50 illegal immigrants to Greece, in Turkish waters, after the Georgian registered cargo vessel "Pati" hit a rock on 1st January has again highlighted the danger confronted by the immigrants without proper documents to enter Europe or any rich country. They were locked in the cargo hold in the sunken part of the ship with no chance of escape. The ship was supposed to have been carrying a cargo of cement.

It is reported that a group of illegal immigrants originated largely from Bangladesh, Iran

Afghanistan and Pakistan were 'human cargo' hidden in the vessel bound for Greece from the Turkish port of Antalya. One Bangladeshi male (Abul Kalam Azad, 27) was reported to have been rescued from the stormy sea on 2nd January by the Turkish naval commandos. TV footage showed him on a stretcher carried by the Turkish rescuers; 16 Pakistanis, 10 Iranians and the crew members were also rescued.

Last year, it may be recalled that, 58 Chinese nationals (mostly from Fujian province)

suffocated themselves inside a refrigerated truck in Dover (England) while trying to enter Britain from mainland Europe. The two incidents provide a graphic illustration how desperate the people have become from the Third World to enter and enjoy the life-style of the First World, putting their lives at risk. What do the incidents tell us?

They tell us that we live in a cruel world. The dead bodies are mere statistics for record. The poor people have to risk their lives to find work for living. Human poverty and inequality remain a huge problem for the international community of this century.

The UN and the World Bank have been telling the industrialised world that the rich are getting richer as poor nations struggle on fringes of the global village characterised by globalisation and high-tech economy. For example, it is reported that the US has more computers than the rest of the world combined. A computer that costs a month's average wage in America takes about eight years' income from the average resident in Bangladesh.

The gap between rich and poor countries is larger at the beginning of this new century than it was in the beginning of the last century. The wealth gap is widening as the time goes by.

The UN Human Development Programme Report (1999) said that global inequalities in income and living standards have "reached grotesque proportions." The richest countries have only 20 per cent of the world's population but 86 per cent of its income.

With modern communication, information revolution and economic globalisation, the world has become a global village. People are now more globally oriented than they were in the past. No country, big or small, can remain in isolation. With easy transportation avail-

able, the movement of people has become much easier than before. With the help of the electronic media the people of the Third World are aware of the affluent living standards and job opportunities in rich countries. It is obvious when the young people do not find employment in their own country, they look for work in rich countries.

The right to work has been further reinforced in Article 6 of the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). In Article 2 of the Covenant the State parties are required to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the Covenant will be exercised "without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status".

In the light of the rights under international law it could be strongly argued that where a person's life is in danger or insecure because of poverty or unemployment that person has a right to move from his/her country to another country. It follows therefore that the migration of people without visa or entry permit is a serious matter of human rights and their rights need to be respected and protected.

Another matter that needs attention is that the immigration laws have been turning Europe or America into formidable fortress. There is a view that the underpinnings of laws are embedded in latent or veiled racial discrimination. The laws are being enacted to make difficult, if not impossible, for legal entry into the West by a person from the Third World.

It has to be realised that no person wishes to leave his/her country of origin unless there are compelling reasons to do so. The migrants in foreign lands face an alien culture and language and live far away from their loved ones. The emotional strain from separation is quite stressful and deep. They suffer silently, sometimes in indignity. If the people of the Third World

enjoy a good quality of life in their own countries, it is unlikely they would move to a foreign country.

The cat and mouse game between the so-called illegal migrants and the laws of immigration will continue to be exploited by the "human smugglers" unless the Third World's poverty is addressed by the industrialised countries. The industrialised countries may take concrete actions such as, easy and preferential access to their markets of goods from the Third World, write off the debts, and transfer of technology together with massive foreign aid to break the cycle of poverty in the Third World. At the same time the Third World need policies that attract foreign direct investment to trigger job opportunities, to stem corruption from the system of administration and to invest in education and health sectors.

Conclusion

Desperate people take to desperate means. The drowning of the persons in cold and windy waters in Turkey is a shame to the world's community. The unfortunate episode was preventable. The humanitarian aspect of the situation needs to be considered urgently.

Migration appears to be a global issue of the 21st century and the flow of the migrants cannot be avoided given the increasing disparity in income between poor and rich nations. Free trade and free flow of electronic media (cable TV) are only one side of a coin the other side being the freedom of travel for any person to any country for employment for living. It has to be addressed through a commonsense legal regime, not by draconian law, where both rich and poor nations would accommodate each other's interest in a prudent way for peace, harmony and stability of the world.

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To the Editor ...

Give police a pay hike

Sir, The DS editorial of 11 December Chief Justice's *Timely Comment* dwelt upon and suggested, among other things, the reforms that our police need imperatively, especially because they have stooped to all time low in engaging themselves, with exception to a very few, in earning by means of corrupt practices, besides their violation of human rights convention by persecuting the alleged criminals while in their custody. I prefer only to point out here about the petty crimes the police, with exception to a very few, make them susceptible to without the slightest regard to the norms of their services. The DS was quite just while it went to suggest in favour of pay increase of the ranks as a measure to dissuade them from committing petty crimes. It is really a disquieting scene when it comes to their collecting toll even from the floating vendors of vegetables and other likewise items who come down from beyond the urban areas and occupy the footpath to sell their

head-loads. I have seen the policemen in plainclothes as also in uniforms to collect toll and in around Farmgate areas from the very poor vendors/hawkers who can barely earn their livelihood from such footpath selling, and in fact they are used to this practice everywhere across the country. The other day the DS also printed photographs of the policemen allowing illegal permission to the rickshawpullers in receipt of tolls. People also viewed many TV reports where the drivers of trucks in particular and other vehicles in general revealing the meanest form of regular toll collection by the members of traffic police. No report either in print or on TV screen would be enough to hang their head in shame and undaunted them from doing so. We must admit that the low ranking police also earn a very slim income which is, candidly speaking, one of the stark realities for them to deviate from their ordained path. When the officials in every sectors, barring a very few, doing their job in a better situation than the police then why will not the police indulge in earning by foul means?

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Easing traffic jam in Dhaka

Sir, A recent news item published in some dailies speaks of government's decision to construct several new roads and inroads for easing traffic jam in the capital. As far as I understand the major cause of traffic jam right from the Bijoy Sharani, near old airport at Tejgaon to Mohakhali crossing is due to convergence of vehicles bound for Uttara, Tongi and onwards. To partly solve the problem, the government may consider constructing an alternate road through Mirpur Section-12. The road plan may be Rokeya Sharani-Mirpur, Cantonment 12-Bauna-Uttara-Tongi-Bauna Moza. It is a low lying area where people still cultivate seasonal crops and human settlement there is very scanty. If a decision is taken now, there will be less problem as far as rehabilitation is concerned. So, I request the DS to publish an exhaustive report on the issue concerning public importance.

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