

eight years when Indian troops



DHAKA MONDAY MARCH 5, 2001

Don't squander the chance

Early polls are for the asking

EGUM Zia has two clear-cut alternatives before her to try and come out of the politics of dead-end she is ploughing very much as a lonely furrow at this point in time. Either she accepts the normal course of events shaping to meander into national polls or she goes right in for early elections which she has been pressing for anyway but without any effect so far. For, she is trying to force the issue there rather than taking a constitutional route to success.

In the first option, she has to only nod at dissolution of parliament in July, take-over by a neutral caretaker government, fixation of election schedules by the Election Commission and the eventual conduct of polls accordingly. On the contrary, if she is reluctant to take the normal route which she has made no bones about by her persistent calls for early election then, too, she has a perfect option to try and make that happen. The Prime Minister has lately offered election any day, meaning thereby that she is ready to quit before time just as the opposition wants. She has invited the opposition to put a date to national election which in effect means that she is calling upon Begum Zia to decide a date for the dissolution of parliament and that of the PM's resignation before the end of their full terms. What the opposition leader is trying to achieve through agitation is being offered on a platter, so to speak

So, a political solution is on the table now. And it is manifestly uncomplicated and fail-safe, too. Uncomplicated in the sense that the opposition can announce their preferred poll date from any platform without having to go to parliament. It looks fail-safe because the PM cannot go back on her words uttered publicly that she would abide by the opposition's decision on the election date.

No loss of face will be involved if the PM's latest overture to resolve the deepening political deadlock is favourably responded to by the opposition. Shunning the path of anarchy will help the opposition win people's heart while the polls are saved from the teetering edge of uncertainty.

Evasion of safety rules

Eid rush invites launch disaster

E are amazed at the mischievous manner in which launch owners and operators are circumventing safety laws, thus placing thousands of lives at risk. As reported in the daily Prothom Alo on Saturday, uncertified launches are taking to the river in large numbers to meet the Eid-ul Azha rush, thereby undermining a ruling by the High Court. This directive in February had instructed all launches to comply with safety regulations before being allowed to ply. But not only have a majority of launches managed to avoid scrutiny, but also, they have now been armed with a waiver by the shipping state minister, allowing them to be used during Eid. Although officials have claimed that the waiver allows vessels to be "taken out" for a couple of hours, it is clear that this is a pretext because scores of launches without due certification are back in service. Such flagrant and consistent violation of rules is inexcusable.

With Eid literally days away, the danger to passengers on faulty vessels is obvious. Only a few months ago, a launch disaster had killed 200 people and injured scores more, causing a public-interest litigation to be made and the HC ruling on it. The mishap was due to the common practice by launch owners to use cheaper steel rather than wood in the hull of a launch, thus altering the balance of the boat while also making the joints less resistant to shocks. The purpose of the certification procedure is to ensure such malpractices are shunned, along with other acts of negligence such as the absence of lights and the cramming together of seats to accommodate more passengers. Negligence and non-compliance have caused many disasters already. In spite of these experiences the shipping ministry has dragged its feet for weeks and indeed, is going so far as to facilitate evasion of a specific court directive on navigation safety. Since the ultimate responsibility for any mishap will rest squarely on the shoulders of the government the latter must seek an explanation from the ministry concerned.

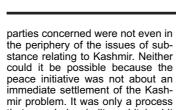


BRIG (RTD) M ABDUL HAFIZ

T partition in 1947 the problem was simple to be resolved even if there was war. It was only to decide

whom did Kashmir belong to: India or Pakistan. If the question could be settled either through mediation or referendum on the basis of the principles adopted for the partition, it could be the end of the dispute. Now after more than half a century's cross currents of conflicts and their influences on Kashmir the issue has become so multi-dimensional that it defies any easy solution of the dispute

Today there are so many parties to the problem and so much diverse are their views on the future dispensation of the state that to accommodate them all in one solution is virtually impossible. There is fresh debate over the future status of the state whether it would permanently remain divided along the present line of control or should be turned into undivided one with either of the contenders. Should it be independent or accede to either India or Pakistan as envisaged in the UN resolution? Some even broach the idea of trifurcating the state to cater for all major communities of Kashmir. Then there is the role of Kashmiris themselves whose



voices were ignored earlier by both India and Pakistan in a future settle-

ment of Kashmir. The last but not the

least is the question of the disposal

of dozen plus militant groups who

had been the catalyst of events in

Kashmir for last twelve years and

The unravelling of all these

questions as well as various incre-

mental steps would perhaps pro-

gressively lead towards the resolu-

tion of this very complex, multifac-

eted conflict. During the last three

months of ceasefire in Kashmir

unilaterally declared by India the

staked a role in the state's future.

that was being built up bit by bit awaiting the hard matters of the issue to come at a latter stage. It is still shrouded in mystery

when and how exactly the process started at all. But it definitely began much before the Indian Prime Minister's unilateral declaration of ceasefire in November last. It would be naive and a travesty of the reality to believe that the progress so far made on Kashmir was the product

Lahore Declaration and Shimla groups Accord and made it clear that it would talk to India only if it was prepared to talk on the core issue of Kashmir. Then came a turn-around. Following his tete-a-tete with Bill Clinton General Pervez Musharaf publicly offered to meet the Indian Prime Minister anywhere at any time without any precondition. Next. immediately after the US undersecretary of state Thomas Pickering's visit to South Asia in May last year Islamabad applied unilateral self restraint on the Line of Control (LoC). By about the same time the changes were apparent also in Indian attitude. The Indians, on their part, suddenly started releasing the

The changing dynamics of peace in Kashmir

only of the efforts of the govern-

ments of India and Pakistan. There

are invisible actor or actors to pull

the string from behind. Or else how

could there be a U-turn in the atti-

tude and actions of the local lead-

of former US President Bill Clinton

India was not prepared to talk to

anyone on Kashmir not even to its

own Kashmiris. Also it had nothing

to do with a military regime in Paki-

stan. And the Pakistan's military

regime on its part immediately after

its take over repudiated both

Before the visit in March last year

ers?

Nevertheless, the Indian prime minister's Ramadhan ceasefire in November last was considered a big step towards normalisation and eventual settlement in Kashmir. Pakistan's response to it was not only prompt and appropriate, it had gone to the extent of withdrawing part of its troops from the LoC. However, a sense of drift and uncertainty about the prospect ahead persisted. The ceasefire, twice extended, could not ensure a substantive reduction of violence in Kashmir. Because neither India totally scaled down its repressive measures presumably out of nervousness, nor Pakistan could put

course, the unilateral ceasefire first

declared in July last by Hizbul

Majahideen, the largest and the

most dreaded of the militant

PERSPECTIVES

The Indian government has decided to extend the ceasefire for the third time taking it beyond 26

February for at least another one month. This gives the chances of peace another lease of life. Although

there are extremist elements in both the countries capable of blowing off any peace effort to pieces, there

are also people with great impulse for peace who are equally capable of stitching thin together. For they

know that an eventual deal on Kashmir would bring relief to the perpetual agony of both the countries.

the firebreathing Jihadi elements under greater restraints apparently separatist leaders of the All Party Hurrvat Conference (APHC) from because of its inability to do so. the prisons and making contact with them. Interestingly, Pakistan Although both have taken careful which always considered Kashmir and calibrated steps towards peace, a bilateral problem between India both are, like the wary boxers in the and Pakistan, did not show any early rounds, circling and watching adverse reaction to involving the each other's manoeuvre and inten-APHC leaders in the peace process. tion. The weired situation cannot but A major link between these developtax the patience of each other to its ments and Mr Vajpayee's muchtouted unilateral ceasefire was, of

Mr Vajpayee has so far made no substantive move to open dialogue with Kashmiri leadership or Pakistan, giving rise to a spate of speculation. The preliminaries of the

peace process have been unduly

prolonged. By delaying the issu-

ance of passport to all members of

APHC delegation which is to visit

Pakistan the Indian government has

virtually stalled the peace process.

As a result, the Kashmiris and

Pakistanis got somewhat impatient

with the uncertainty surrounding the

talk on the future status of the state.

After taking reciprocal confidence

building measures (CBM) taken by

both sides they appear so unsure

entire peace architecture built so far

came crumbling down last week

when Kashmir was rocked by some

of the most violent civil unrests in

It was not thus surprising that the

about what next

opened fire disregarding the ceasefire on 15 February in the town of Haigam. Fearing the escalation of violence curfew was clamped in major cities including Srinagar and the APHC leaders were taken into custody. Indian president in his speech to the parliament accused Pakistan of undermining the ceasefire and doing nothing to reinin Pakistan-based militants. Pakistan, in its riposte, said that "India had kept up a campaign of terror throughout the ceasefire" and pointed to the current protests against Indian rule. The threat to the peace initiative was total when Indian airspace was violated in Chhamb sector by Pakistani aircraft which were fired upon by Indian

Notwithstanding the setback there is silverlining in the gloomy sky. Amidst speculations to the contrary, the Indian government has decided to extend the ceasefire for the third time taking it beyond 26 February for at least another one month. This gives the chances of peace another lease of life. Although there are extremist elements in both the countries capable of blowing off any peace effort to pieces, there are also people with great impulse for peace who are equally capable of stitching thin together. For they know that an eventual deal on Kashmir would bring relief to the perpetual agony of both the countries. Peace would liberate Pakistan from its seemingly inexorable decline. For India the human and material cost of insurgency is an unwanted burden and a blemish on its image. Only an end to it can relieve her of the burden.

Gulf and ME: Test of Bush presidency in foreign policy matters

remained largely isolated from the world during the last ten years but of late there are signs that the world is showing some reconciliation to the country which is mired by many problems including the sanctions that followed its occupation of Kuwait. Civilian planes of different nations including some from the western nations began landing in Baghdad defying restrictions and many countries are also calling for softening of attitude towards Bagh-ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY dad because of severe hardship people there are suffering due to the sanctions. Permanent members of

multi-national forces. Baghdad a decade ago. Vice-president Dick Cheney was the defence minister when senior Bush was the president and present secretary of state Colin Powell a General engaged in the war on the ground. And of course, new president being the son of the then president also in a way was in the nemesis of the war against Irag. All this comes to mind when the action against Iraq took place within four weeks of Bush presidency and also the first military decision by the new administration

New government in Washington follows the eight-year old Clinton era, which will certainly be embedded in the history as one of the most period, despite personal scandals, saw enormous dynamism of the American presidency which not only spared no efforts to give the Americans a good economy along with a sense of pride but also remained deeply entrenched in the international scene mainly in the effort of resolution of intractable conflicts. President Clinton was active almost tirelessly till the last day in the office for a settlement of the Middle East crisis and his seemingly ineaxustible energy nearly brought the crisis to a solution which is obviously very tough because of the complex nature of the tangle. He not

only tried his best to see to it that two

policy matters as he did not have any exposure as such. The former Governor of Texas is, however, conscious of this and has selected a team which has experienced persons. But he has to keep in mind the performance of his predecessor and has to chart his policy on foreign matters in a way so that he is not seen in a poor light by the Americans and others out side and this is particularly important as speculations were rife before the elections that a Republican presidency would be less effective in the international field.

The bombing of Iraq was per-haps an act to send a strong mes-



Bush presidency needs to reduce tension in the Gulf involving Iraq rather than exacerbating it and play a role in the Middle East by bringing Sharon to talks urging him to give up the hardline approach. The new US administration will earn admiration only if it shows constructive approach in both the areas. If it is keen to continue the peace process in the ME then it should show restraint in the Gulf.

China and France are in favour of lifting the sanction while some Arab countries which opposed Iraq tooth and nail during the Gulf war have also come out with liberal approach to the oil-rich Iraq which cannot sell

the United Nations like Russia.

interesting and eventful ones in some ways or other. Interesting Clinton's second tenure because was replete with such unbelievable sequences that he was about to lose his presidency over personal scandals and then just before relinquishing the charges the dramatic events surrounding the elections for the American presidency. Never before in the long history of the United States an election has been so much controversial in the sense that it took long 34 days after the voting to determine who won the highest office of the nation and that too through the intervention of the highest court of the country which also gave a split judgement on the issue favouring Geore W. Bush. President Clinton's popularity rate was very high when he relin quished office on January 20.His much

warring sides narrow their differsage that the White House is capaences through bilateral discussions but also employed everything possible under his possession to wield considerable pressure on both

ble of taking bold decision on the international issues after a change at the helm and Republicans being back after a gap of two terms. Since a stand-off persists in the Middle

East due to the transition period in

Israel following prime minister's

election allowing little room for the Americans to demonstrate any

diplomatic stance, Bush administra-

tion clearly took up the Irag issue

which is also inextricably linked with

the previous Republican govern-

ment and senior Bush presidency. But the action does not appear to

have achieved much objective

barring that the new administration

may not take much time to dip down

in the foreign affairs matters. The

US and Britain took the decision of

this caused some misunderstanding in the West itself. The action was also disapproved by several Arab nations which are otherwise close to the West Colin Powell's talks in the Middle

East were more preliminary in nature as the secretary of state is familiarising himself with the situation and he just heard the positions of parties involved in the conflict Hardline Israeli leader Ariel Sharon was still grappling to form a coalition government in spite of the fact that he won handsomely the February 6 elections for prime minister defeating relatively softer Ehud Barak who favoured peace with the Palestinians while retaining the Israeli interests on several aspects of the disputes. Barak's talks with Yasser Arafat had made progress towards a settlement even though fell much short of a settlement. But Sharon outrightly rejects any talks for peace till the current uprising by the Pales-tinians is halted which Arafat has rejected. Meanwhile, Barak has quit politics in disgust following criticisms in his own I abour party after he had reportedly agreed to become defence minister in the new coalition government under Sharon. The hardline attitude of Sharon and departure of Barak from the scene has posed a challenge to the Bush administration on how to proceed with the Middle East peace process while the president has urged all sides to return to negotiation table Bush presidency needs to diminish tensions in the Gulf involving Iraq rather than exacerbating it and play a role in the Middle East by bringing Sharon to talks urging him to give up the hardline approach. The new US administration will earn admiration only if it shows constructive approach in both the areas. If it is keen to continue the peace process in the ME then it should show restraint in the Gulf.

ddle East and held talks with the sides concerned.

T is nearly one and a half months

that Goerge W. Bush has taken

over as the 43rd president of the

most powerful nation of the

world the United States. During this

time, the new administration has

acted on two important international

flashpoints concerning world peace

and stability. The Middle East situa-

tion certainly remains the most

disconcerting global crisis as it

continues to defy a settlement which

at one stage some time ago

appeared nearer to a peace formula

but once again seems to have gone

back to square one after the election

of Ariel Sharon as the new prime

minister of Israel. The new secretary

of state of the United States Colin

Powell has paid his first visit to the

But it was the Gulf where the new American president acted earlier than taking interest in the Middle East situation. Interestingly, nothing serious existed in the Gulf to warrant a sudden bombing by the United States and Britain on Iraq which is still reeling under the adverse effects of the Gulf War ten years ago. Senior Bush, the father of the present president, was at the helm in the United States when the war centring Iraq's illegal occupation of sovereign tiny neighbour Kuwait took place and Iraq was finally driven out of Kuwait by the US-led

oil beyond certain quota approved by the UN on humanitarian ground. It is in this situation, the new American administration has swung into action on the country and obviously the bombings by the Anglo-American planes is a warning that Bush presidency takes a hardline policy towards the 'recalcitrant' Gulf nation.

The attack in Irag surprised many including several allies in the West because of its timing and without much valid reasons. Then again the key policy makers in the new US government are those who played important role in the Gulf war

the parties.

In the international arena, Bill Clinton's performance is seen as quite remarkable. George Bush's first problem obviously is to fight the image of the past president which appears as near-monumental to many. This success story was largely responsible for the good showing by the defeated presidential candidate Al Gore who was vice president during the two tenures of Clinton. He won more popular votes than his rival but lost the race because of complex electoral system of the United States.

EDITOR TO THE

bombings apparently without con-George Bush does not have sultations with allies like France and experience in the foreign

ΤΟ ΤΗΕ

Chittagong Port

Chittagong Port Authority's (CPA) attention was drawn to the editorial "Chittagong Port is a national asset. Declare services under it essential" (January 31). The information and statistics in the report are not based on facts. The tariff rate of CPA is the lowest in comparison with other regional ports. Port dues of vessel per Gross Registered Tonnage (GRT) in Karachi Port is US \$0.46. Chittagong Port dues of vessel per Gross Registered Tonnage is US \$ 0.241. The rate of container handling of one unit of 20' container in Chittagong Port is US \$43.40 while in Colombo port it is US \$100.

Chittagong Port is the prime port of Bangladesh, handling about 80 per cent of the sea-borne trade (export and import). In 1999-2000 CPA handled about 17 million tons of cargo and over 4 Lac TEUS (Twenty feet equivalent unit) containers, the highest record performance of the Port It is untrue and unkind to term Chittagong Port as the 'most badly managed port'. Industrial relations in the port are now satisfactory as is evident from the fact that the port was not closed even for one day in the year 2000 for port worker/labour unrest. It is not correct that: "Labour unrest and strikes have caused it to be closed for an average of nearly 96 hours per month for over three years." The port has been kept operative round the clock even on weekly holidays and hartal days.

Regarding erosion of efficiency, please note that the efficiency of a port depends on many factors such as duration of ships' stay in port, quality of cargo handling, quality of service to inland vehicles. Only the quality of cargo handling is under the port authority's control. The port is used by different

conflicting interest groups. If the interest of any group is hampered, the CPA is blamed. CPA's attention was also drawn to the news captioned "Hartal scare grips Chittagong again" published on the same date. The statement: "operation cost for businessmen for a 20 feet container is 640 US Dollar at Chittagong Port due to hartal and other disruptions" is not correct. As per CPA schedule of charges the handling cost

of one 20 feet container is US \$112 including loading charge, extra movement, lift on charges and river dues. Container handling costs by other parties should not be attributed to CPA's cost

Port activity is influenced by prevailing conditions in the country. Its efficiency and dynamism do not depend merely on its own merit, but are a combination of the whole and not a matter to be dealt in isolation

ANMA Momin

Secretary Chittagong Port Authority

Your quoted rates may be low, but actual cost is higher because of other factors. We are not interested in attributing blame, but there must be some central authority to improve things. We think CPA is that body. - Edito

Hostages in CHT

I am very annoyed by the recent drama in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and like the people of Bangladesh, I want an immediate solution. The UPDF is the prime suspect without any reason. Since the peace agreement everyone want to say that CHT has become peaceful and it is basking in development. We, the people of CHT are tired with so much 'development' in our beloved land. Stop the development, and start listening to the heart-beat of the CHT people

How much of the demands of the CHT people have been realized? Was the peace accord really a solution? There has been a vacuum of power, and groups made up of former Shantibahini men are involved in anti-social activities Why can't they be the prime suspects? The media regularly publishes reports alleging that the UPDF is responsible for the deteriorating situation, but why doesn't the media care when ndreds of UPDF supporters are killed by JSS cadres simply for not supporting the peace accord? The JSS has experience fighting in the CHT jungle and they now have political and administrative support. But unless the UPDF was popular among the hill people, why is it that they can't be

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned

Looking the other way



Breaking bricks can damage tiny hands, fingers and toes. The fumes are unhealthy, the labour backbreaking. But child labour persists because parents are too poor to choose better options for them. The authorities don't care and even society looks the other way. Children earn a paltry Tk5 to Tk7 per day. Is it worth the danger? Why can't the law be enforced?

evicted? Are they fostered and cherished by the Hill people? These are questions to

Aungya Marma Don't abandon new schedule!

The new schedule for the inter-city train 'Egara Sindhur' is convenient for passengers who want to visit the remote areas of Pakundia, Hossainpur, Katiadi, Tarail, Itna, Mitamoin, Bajitpur and Ashtagram in Kishoreganj district from Dhaka. I thank the railway authorities for formulating the new schedule.

But unfortunately some quarters, that are out to safeguard the interest of private bus service operators, are opposed to the new schedule. The other day I read a report published in a Bangla daily that Bhairabbound passengers from the capital are against the new schedule. It is most unfortunate as Bhairab passengers have many options. Inter-city trains bound for Chittagong, Noakhalai and Sylhet from

Dhaka make stopovers in Bhairab. I hope the authorities will stick to the new sched-

Md Minhazuddin

Pakundia, Kishoregan

I would like to sincerely express my thanks to you for publishing a cross section of news and views, particularly political news without any bias. Many thanks to the reporters who spend a great deal of time to bring us accurate reports. Please keep it

Shaikh Damman

Saudi Arabia

Reduce the gap Professor Shamsad Mortuza's analysis "Let arguments be the only weapons" (February 17) on the basic issue confront

ing the nation on secularism on the one side and a religious bias on the other, is welcome. Suppression and oppression are not the solutions. The communication gap has to be reduced. Society is suffering acutely from different types of polarisation, -political, religious, and cultural -- and many feel that political lobbies are trying to monopolize the outcome. This is not fair The issue is beyond the political arena. Hard-line, soft-line, or diplomatic stance the issue should not be kept pending, as inflammable material is involved. Bangladesh has accumulated a lot of mental garbage in three decades. The cases have to be disposed off, in the public interest. Sometimes waiting is not a solution. After a national debate, political extremism should be made an election issue

ABD Dhaka

17.2.2001

Learning to love water

According to the United Nations, 21st century wars will be fought over water, a basic necessity of life that is dwindling faster than it can be replenished on this earth. Worldwide, 1.3 billion people experience "water stress" because they live with water shortages. By 2025, predicts the UN, two out of three people on earth will live in water-stressed conditions

We need to learn to appreciate this

precious resource and we need to teach

our children to treasure every drop of it.

These are the reasons that drive the "Water

for Life" campaign that the World Wildlife

Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia has been

running for the past three years. WWF is

Keep it up!

organising a water carnival to raise funds for its efforts to educate the public on the need to conserve and manage water. The carnival will take place between 8am and 5pm on April 8 at Lake Titiwangsa, Kuala Lumpur. If readers in Bangladesh are interested, please visit the website

<u>fmalaysia.org</u>

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