

Tact missing in political language

Tongue-lashing should stop

PRIME Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in her valedictory speech at the prorogation of the parliament's session on Monday offered the Opposition an olive branch on the one hand, and took it away, on the other. This left political observers guessing what she actually intended by such a mixed approach. In politics, at her level, and more important perhaps, given the BNP-AL confrontational eye-balling at each other, even simple blowing of hot and cold would have been self-defeating, let alone sending across clearly readable contradictory signals.

The prime minister said in so many words that she was prepared to work with the opposition in taking the country forward. She offered to sit with the opposition for a dialogue and invited them to join her in parliament and her development endeavour. If these sentiments were uttered unstuck from rancour, they would have marked a step forward. But that was not to be; for, in the same breath, she scolded the opposition for their attempts at dislodging her government "with conspiracy and criminal activities...". The tirade was topped off by the remark: people have rejected the opposition, etc. Evidently, the invitation to the opposition for a dialogue stood negated thereby.

Begum Zia, being in power, has the potential initiative in her hand to lead the way for a dialogue, and we urge her to realise that potential in fostering a working relationship with the opposition in the very least.

That said, we turn to what the opposition leader has said. Sheikh Hasina has given an ultimatum to the government to track down killers of Ahsanullah Master in a week or else she would order the shutting down of mills and factories and transport services all over the country. Who will be hurt: the government or the people and the economy in general? Needless to say, the latter; and at what cost to her party's image? We are definitely concerned over the fate of Ahsanullah murder case, and do welcome pressing the government for an early delivery of justice. But why link it to economic suffering?

The opposition, for its part, must not take a course that affects its standing with the people. It would be impolitic on their part even to unwittingly see all the routes to a dialogue sealed. Moreover, it would be in supreme national interest not to be doing so.

Time to eat the humble pie!

Let the UN take charge

THE recent assassination of the head of the Iraqi Governing Council, Abu Zahra Osman Mohammad, indicates the deep resentment of the Iraqi public towards and distrust of the IGC. Zahra is the second member of the IGC to have become a target of the Iraqi freedom fighters, insurgents to the occupation forces. That the IGC is seen as a collaborator of the occupation forces is manifested in the recent killing. Not even the vaunted, supposedly impregnable "Green Zone" could prevent the suicide killer from getting to Mr. Zahra.

The current situation in Iraq has taken the form of a full-blown 'insurgency', just as one had expected it would. Falujah and Nassiriya resemble Beirut of the 90s and the West Bank and Gaza of today. Too much blood has been spilled for the so-called "Iraqi Freedom." The operation has been an unmitigated blunder and a dismal failure.

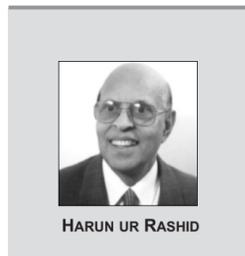
Dwindling public support points to the change in public perception in the US and UK about the rationale of going to war with Iraq. The pretense of Iraqi occupation, based on deceit and falsehood, has been seen through. Both Bush and Blair are under enormous pressure to get out of Iraq. Amidst the falling support for Bush there is also demand for his impeachment. To top it all, it has now been revealed that it was Rumsfeld who was behind the whole prison atrocity episode.

Blair is not doing very well in his home front either, having to hear the call for the British to get out of Iraq and for him to get out of office. It is unfortunate that the US and Britain are unwilling to see the writings on the wall. Events are moving too fast and furiously to prevaricate and prognosticate in a make-believe fashion. Perhaps it is time that Bush and Blair ate their humble pies and got out of Iraq, and allowed the UN to take over.

Admittedly, it would be a big mess for the UN to sort out, but it is the only institution left to clear the Augean stable which Iraq is today.

Although Ziaur Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

Why did the BJP lose the election?



HARUN UR RASHID

Credit must go to India's democratic traditions. It is robust, alive and kicking as the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee decided to resign within hours of the news of defeat of the BJP. This is democracy at its best in Asia. No claim of vote rigging or other allegations has been made on the outcome of the election. The BJP President Venkaiah Naidu appeared in the TV and succinctly said: "As we have not got the mandate of the people, we have decided to sit in the opposition". The gracious acceptance of the defeat by the BJP sharply contrasts with reception of election results in many democracies in Asia.

The BJP-led government has ruled the country for about six years in total. Under its administration, India's economic gains has been enormous, militarily it has become more powerful with strategic relationship with the US and Israel in defence cooperation. India has become the 7th largest exporter of food grains in the world. It is the third largest Asian economy. It has paid US\$3 billion of its loans to the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, politely declined aid from a string of countries, and wrote off debts owed to India by several poor countries. India's foreign exchange reserves crossed over US\$ 100 billion mark. Furthermore, it has in many ways mended its relations with China and Pakistan. This is India's profile that the BJP wanted to project, conveniently ignoring that one third of its total population (1.2 billion) are steeped in extreme poverty.

Observers believe that in the light of the "fantastic record" of the government, the "Young Turks" of the BJP persuaded the Prime Minister to call the election six months ahead as they predicted that the BJP-led government would

cruise to power like "a knife through butter". As the election continued in phases, exit polls indicated that the Congress party was catching up with the BJP. However, the BJP stalwarts were confident of their victory.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (79) took the defeat stoically saying: "Victory and defeat are a part of life which are to be viewed with equanimity", while the Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi (58) assured the nation that "the Congress party would ensure a strong, stable and secular government". On foreign policy with

their life. It is the poor people who become conscious of their empowerment during election-time and register their approval or disapproval regarding performance of a government. It appears that they have voted against the BJP-led government because the economic growth has not benefited them. It benefited business and middle class, the greatest supporters of BJP, who reportedly, "stayed home".

Second, the ill-conceived election campaign-slogan of BJP "India shining" was not only been counter-productive but also damaged the

minority community (Muslims and Christians) did not vote for the BJP. The BJP's *Hindutva* doctrine has put off the minorities and they have supported a secular government to return under the Congress party. The followers of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), closely linked with the BJP, have been publicly pushing to build a temple on the site of the demolished Babri mosque in Ayodhya, to the consternation of Muslims. Furthermore, the communal riot in Gujarat two years ago that killed

popularity with ordinary people. Finally, the "Young Turks" of BJP including some of the young Ministers were perceived to be arrogant and supremely confident of BJP's victory. The BJP candidates were touted as vote-catching statesman-politician and they took the electorate for granted. They sent text message through mobile phones to voters, ignoring totally the fact that large number of voters does not have mobile telephones. Furthermore, they did not realise that the government had pursued "anti-people economic" policies with

the attitude of chief minister Narendra Modi (Gujarat state) towards the people. He should not have used the language he used during the campaign when he made references to the Congress leader Sonia Gandhi and her son.

All these statements reflect disappointment, resentment and anger toward the BJP and confidence in the Congress party. It is a surprise that the political workers and leaders of the BJP did not pick up the "political pulse" of majority of people.

Conclusion
The unexpected success of the Congress led by Sonia Gandhi constitutes a huge political metamorphosis in India. Political observers believe that a stable coalition with the support of the leftist parties is likely to emerge soon in New Delhi. On 15th May, the Congress parliamentary party elected Sonia Gandhi as its leader, effectively securing her position as the Prime Minister.

A big challenge awaits the new Prime Minister in a country populated by more than one billion people. The economic reforms that began under the Congress party in 1991 are likely to continue but priorities may get redesigned to ensure that benefits are percolated down to the poor.

It may be recalled that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and Sonia Gandhi's grand father-in-law, in his book titled *"The Discovery of India" (1946)* rejected injection of Hindu nationalism in politics and wrote that religion-based politics "is a reversion to some medieval conception which cannot be fitted into the modern world". That view was expressed more than 57 years ago and the BJP wanted to continue Hindu religion-based politics in India at the beginning of the 21st century. The overwhelming majority of people decisively and rightly rejected the BJP's *Hindutva* ideology and they deserve commendation and congratulation for their decision.

By all accounts, the majority of Indians are decent, tolerant, secular-minded. It is hoped that the Congress-led government will be able to undo the poisonous impact of the religion-based politics on the Indian body politics by the BJP.

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BOTTOM LINE

The unexpected success of the Congress led by Sonia Gandhi constitutes a huge political metamorphosis in India. On 15th May, the Congress parliamentary party elected Sonia Gandhi as its leader, effectively securing her position as the Prime Minister... The economic reforms that began under the Congress party in 1991 are likely to continue but priorities may get redesigned to ensure that benefits are percolated down to the poor.

Pakistan, she reportedly stated that "we have all along been saying a dialogue must be initiated with Pakistan."

An obvious question is: why did the BJP-led alliance lose the election? Many factors have played a role but five in particular may deserve mention.

First, economic growth in India did not trickle down to the poor. Economic growth is largely measured in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) whereas social development is measured in terms of overall improvement of quality of life of all sections of people in the country.

Development can be measured by asking three simple questions. What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality among people within the country? In India, under the BJP-led coalition government, all three of these criteria have not declined from high levels and accordingly, one may conclude that the economic boom under the government has left the poor out in the cold.

India has predominantly an agrarian economic base. Agriculture constitutes 70 per cent of India's GDP and the majority of hard-working peasants in rural areas saw no tangible improvement of quality of

profile of the BJP. Former BBC India correspondent Mark Tully reported his personal assessment in the following words:

"Nowhere in the country did I find anyone who believed their India was 'shining', as the BJP claimed... That slogan will undoubtedly return to haunt the BJP for many years."

Tully was right. To poor people, India was not 'shining' at all, rather it was in 'darkness'. Furthermore, majority of voters knew that the government spent taxpayer's money spreading the wrong message. It seemed that the campaign slogan was a cruel joke in a nation where a third of people (more than 300 million) still live on less than US\$ 1 a day and human development indices are largely appalling. One peasant reportedly hit the nail to the campaign by saying: "how can exchange of emails by computers move the country forward when we struggle to meet our daily basic needs?"

The campaign slogan of BJP is similar to that of "Development Decade" used in 1968 during the term of dictator President Ayub Khan of Pakistan and soon after he had to resign. There is a saying that if you squeeze a lemon too hard, it becomes bitter. Similar effect occurred with the campaign slogan of the BJP.

Third, it appears that majority of

about 2,000 Muslims while the Modi BJP state government stood by, has further alienated the majority of Muslims from the BJP. Many Christians were also victimised by the militants of RSS and a few years ago, in Orissa, a Christian priest and his son were killed.

Fourth, the continued attack of BJP leaders on Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin appears to have been boomeranged. Ordinary people do not care about the Italian origin of Sonia Gandhi because India is a multi-lingual and multi-religious country. A Tamil or Telegu-speaking Indian from the South who marries a northern Punjabi or Kashmiri, has to communicate in English with each other. In such cases, each family is almost a foreigner to each other in their own country.

In the light of the above social matrix, Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin did not become an election issue for ordinary people. After all, Sonia Gandhi, married in 1968 to late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has been an Indian citizen since 1983. She belongs to Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and their son Rahul Gandhi and daughter Priyanka's participation in election had boosted the morale and popularity of the Congress party. (Rahul won Amethi seat with majority of more than 100,000 votes). The election results show that still the Gandhi name can pull massive

Reactions
A sample of reaction of people on the street on the outcome of election has been reported in the BBC and the following comments are interesting.

Rati Lal Kala, a Congress supporter, said: "They said she (Sonia Gandhi) is a foreigner, but the people have given them a reply". Surinder Kumar, an auto-rickshaw driver, stated: "The Congress party will definitely work for people like us, though I did not expect their victory." Aziz, a voluntary worker, reacted and said: "The people have given a reply to the BJP for following the politics of division between communities. How can things improve when there is so much of insecurity on all fronts?"

Pareshbhai Parmar, a taxi driver said: "The BJP lost because it was not able to deliver goods to a poor man. How can one 'feel good' when the government decides to make cell (mobile) phones cheaper and petrol dearer?" Manish Doshi, a student activist, stated:

"The BJP fell flat because of its wrong policies in the state and also

Corruption: Costs and effects

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

ACCORDING to many political scientists, 'corruption in a country undermines the legitimacy of its political institutions and thus the government is less able to rely on the cooperation and support of the people. Consequently, the government is compelled to resort to force and coercive tactics to maintain order against the rising violence. Many of the military takeovers in Asia, Africa and Latin America have been justified by the need to stamp out corruption.' As for the effects of corruption on political development, the political scientists have observed that 'corruption (i) suppresses political opposition, generating increased resentment and violence; (ii) perpetuates and widens social class and economic divisions, leading to societal strain and preventing cohesion; (iii) contributes to political instability and regime change by the extra-constitutional forces.'

In the case of Bangladesh, corruption and misuse of the political parties and regime changes through military takeovers ostensibly to stamp out corruption have impeded the development of a democratic political system. First major blow to the development of a democratic political system came when the Awami League government failing to curb rampant corruption and arrest the ever-declining law and order situation resorted to proclamation of emergency (1974), and replacement of multi-party parliamentary democracy with a one-national party led presidential government under the Constitution (Fourth Amendment) Act, 1975. The one political party dictatorial system was also accompanied by hard laws banning newspapers excepting a few, and curbing civic rights. The above actions created serious frustration among the people, particularly among the educated and politically conscious citizens. According to many political analysts, all these negative developments coupled with intrigues within the ruling party led to the assassination of the President of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August, 1975. Khandaker Mostaque Ahmed who entered upon the office of the President placed the country under martial law.

Although Ziaur Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

led Parliament passed the Constitution (Fifth Amendment) Act, 1979 leading to the lifting of martial law on 9 April 1978, martial law came to be imposed again by Lieutenant General Hussein Muhammad Ershad on 24 March, 1982 on the allegation of corruption and misuse of the ruling BNP government. President Abdus Sattar who was elected President after the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman on 30 May, 1981 was removed. The Chief Martial Law Administrator General Ershad subsequently took over the country's Presidency from Justice AFM Ahsanuddin Chowdhury on 11 December, 1983. Ershad's Jatiya

etc. against the party/parties in power have been common phenomena in Bangladesh. Not that all these allegations are baseless.

Since independence, corruption has been eating into the vitals of Bangladesh economy. From the beginning Bangladesh has been following a centralised planning mechanism for development activities. Government undertakes development projects for implementation through annual development programme (ADP) with both domestic resource and foreign assistance. During the last three decades or so many projects were included in the ADP not on national priority consideration but on political

a seminar on 'Follow-up of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit decisions concerning the SAARC Social Chapter' jointly organised by the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies and Centre for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka on 29 February, 2004, the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs revealed that corruption was holding back economic progress and eating up no less than two percentage points of Bangladesh's GDP growth. He noted that if we could make the best use of the available resources we could achieve seven per cent GDP growth which was at present five per cent.

added tax (VAT), excise duty, and supplementary duty (SD); and (iii) non-tax receipts such as surplus of sector corporations, financial institutions, railways, telegraph and telephone etc. Indirect taxes represent around 80 per cent of total taxes. Our tax departments have a long reputation of corruption. Government is deprived of huge revenues in the collection of income tax, customs duty, VAT and other taxes due to the corrupt practices of the tax officials.

Corruption has become pervasive in public administration in Bangladesh. Hardly any public office or any section of public servants is free from this ignoble vice. Poor pay package,

corruption is a must. All the political parties, particularly the major political parties in power or outside the power, must act in unison to fight this hydra-headed monster. Corruption must be kept above politics.

Like in India, election commission of Bangladesh will ask the candidates for parliament elections to disclose: (1) all their criminal records; (2) all assets and liabilities of themselves and their families; and (3) their educational qualifications. The non-disclosure of the above information would be a ground for the rejection of nomination.

As in Pakistan, the Members of the Parliament (MPs) should be brought under legal obligation to submit in a prescribed form the yearly statements of assets and liabilities of themselves and their families to the Election Commission to be published in the official gazette. If the statement submitted by any MP is found during scrutiny to contain false information he or she may be proceeded against for committing the offence of corrupt practices.

There must be a time limit for final disposal of disciplinary cases against the government servants under the Disciplinary and Appeal Rules. Punishment meted out to the corrupt officials through quick disposal of disciplinary cases will, to a great extent, act as a deterrent to corruption by other officials. Honest officials will also find some solace in it.

Pay and other benefits of civil servants must be maintained at a realistic level. Their salary should as far as possible be competitive with the private sector.

Anti-Corruption Act, 2004 for the formation of the Anti-Corruption Commission was passed by the Parliament in February last. People of the country as well as the development partners want that the Commission is made operational without further delay.

There is a Constitutional obligation (Article 77) to establish the office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman, according to the Constitution, shall exercise such powers and perform such functions as Parliament may, by law determine, including the power to investigate any action taken by a ministry, a public officer or a statutory public authority. So the office of the Ombudsman should be established at the earliest.

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Analysts are of opinion that corruption eats up 10 to 15 per cent of the public sector procurement budget. Actually corruption takes place at various stages of implementation of public sector projects. Quality of work thus suffers for private gains.

Party led Parliament passed the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 1986 leading to the lifting of martial law. There were allegations of widespread corruption. People lost faith in the stage-management election system. All these helped the opposition political parties to raise a forceful demand for a neutral caretaker government for holding parliament elections. The demand for a neutral caretaker government reached such a height that it took the form of mass upsurge and President Ershad had to step down in favour of the nominee of the combined opposition Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, the Chief Justice of Bangladesh on 6 December 1990.

The three national elections held so far peacefully, fairly and impartially under the care-taker government received national and international acclamation. The first one was won by BNP, the second one by Awami League and the third one by BNP led 4-party alliance. But the losing major political party/parties have always declined to accept gracefully the results of the above three elections and brought allegations of "vote dacoity", "rigging" "sharp rigging" etc. Bringing allegations of corruption, misuse of power, infringement upon the rights of the opposition political parties, particularly of the main opposition party in the Parliament, curbing the civic rights of the citizens, politicisation of administration destroying the country's economy

or other considerations without their going through proper identification test, feasibility study and economic analysis. There were delays and cost overrun in implementation of many of these projects. Some such projects were abandoned half-way leading to wastage of scarce national resources. The situation remains the same even today as it is evident from the observation of our Finance Minister. In the seminar on "Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction in Bangladesh" organised by the Governments of Bangladesh and Japan and the Asian Development Bank in Dhaka on 7 December, 2003 the Finance Minister commenting on the weakness in prioritising development projects said that populist or vote oriented projects were getting priority over schemes that were really important for the economic development of the country. He noted that roads and highways sector had the highest incidence of fund-wastage. Hardly any of the 10,000 projects in roads and highways sector and of the flood protection schemes saw full implementation.

Goods and services are required to be procured for implementation of public sector development projects, and analysts are of opinion that corruption eats up 10 to 15 per cent of the public sector procurement budget. Actually corruption takes place at various stages of implementation of public sector projects. Quality of work thus suffers for private gains. While speaking at

Corruption has a negative effect on foreign assistance and investment, particularly on foreign direct investment. Various surveys conducted to find out the impediments to foreign investment in Bangladesh have revealed similar reasons and these are: (i) corruption; (ii) lack of continuity in government policies; (iii) inefficient bureaucracy; (iv) unsatisfactory law and order situation including extortion; (v) frequent general strikes called by the political parties; (vi) politicisation of labour unions and their strikes; (vii) inadequate infrastructure; etc. A number of development partners including Japan have sounded a note of warning by saying that in this age of globalisation investors might shift to new destinations if their problems here were not urgently solved. Peter Bell, President of Care, USA recently visited Bangladesh and during his interview with The Daily Star he diagnosed combating corruption and crime as one of three principal challenges faced by Bangladesh. During his visit to Bangladesh in August last year, Nobel laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz observed that corruption was a major impediment to development in developing countries. We should have no doubt that Bangladesh was very much in his mind.

Public revenue of Bangladesh is earned from (i) direct taxes such as, income tax, gift tax, land development tax, registration; (ii) indirect taxes such as, customs duty, value

economic insecurity, lure of luxurious living, politicisation, shortcomings in existing laws as well as lack of their rigorous enforcement, culture of secrecy are considered as important reasons for corruption by the public servants. Corruption in Secretariat when referred to collectively, delays policy formulation and disposal of attached departments' and statutory bodies' proposals/cases which according to existing acts, rules, regulations and executive orders are required to be approved by the government. We have stated earlier how corruption in the taxes departments deprives the government of huge revenues. Corruption in some other government offices and establishments such as police department, immigration and passport department, education department, registration office, hospitals, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, etc. as well as in some statutory bodies, particularly in the utility bodies and companies such as Bangladesh Power Development Board, Rural Electrification Board, Dhaka Electric Supply Authority, Dhaka Electric Supply Company, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board, Gas Transmission and Distribution Companies, Water and Sewerage Authority causes untold sufferings to the people. Some suggestions and recommendations made by the Services/Public Administration Reforms Commissions/Committees, analysts, sociologists and the civil society to minimise corruption are:

A strong political will to combat

OPINION

A grand opportunity missed

MOHAMMAD TAWFIQUL HAIDER

GEOGRAPHICALLY Cyprus, the third largest island in the Mediterranean, has an area of 9251 sq km and lies only 40 miles south of Turkey. It is this strategic location of Cyprus that led to a long 300 years Ottoman rule from 1571-1878. But despite this the island remained overwhelmingly inhabited by Greeks (Almost 80% of the population). This created an imbroglio between the Greek

majority and the Turkish minority inhabitants living on the island.

Cyprus was granted independence by Britain after a long colonial rule from 1878-1960 on the basis of a tripartite agreement signed by Turkey, Greece and Britain in Zurich and London. The Agreement clearly stipulated that both the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots would co-exist on an equal partnership basis.

History bears ample testimony to the fact that the first President of

Cyprus Archbishop Makarios III violated the Agreement by expelling the Turkish Cypriots from the government in 1963. Since then Greek-Turkish fighting marked the history of Cyprus with bloody clashes taking place particularly in 1965 and 1974. In the name of Enosis (union) with Greece which picked up momentum in 1974 and found expression through a bloody coup led by some Greek colonels under the leadership of Nico Sampson, the Greek Cypriots

unleashed a reign of terror and the Cypriot Turks faced annihilation. In order to protect the helpless Cypriot Muslims from extinction, the UK brotherly armed forces of Turkey had to act sharply by expelling the Greek Cypriot infiltrators from the Muslim dominated areas of Cyprus. The Blue Line or Attila Line running across the island then acted as the line of division to separate the Greek Cypriots from Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus was founded on

February 13, 1975 which was latter renamed as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (hereafter TRNC). But much earlier than that the UN peacekeeping forces had actually started to oversee the developments in the island from 1964 and since then the good offices of UN have been time and again offered for the peaceful solution of the problem.

The latest grand opportunity was placed on a golden platter by none other than the UN Secretary General

Kofi Annan. His historic 'Annan Plan' envisaged a 'United Republic of Cyprus' to solve the issue once for all. But alas! When the referendum was held on this Plan on April 24 the Greek Cypriots committed a Himalayan blunder by rejecting it and in doing so, created as analysts put it "a peculiar situation."

The Cyprus problem has now assumed even more alarming proportions. With only the Greek Cypriots' administration joining the EU on May 1, 2004 the interests of

over three million Muslim Cypriots in TRNC have been most brazenly betrayed and blindly overlooked. It now devolves upon the UNO and the OIC to play yeoman's role by urging upon the countries to recognise the sovereignty and integrity of TRNC, ensure that the democratic structure functioning over there persists undisturbed and more importantly the economic sanctions imposed on the innocent Turkish Cypriots be lifted without undue delay. For the TRNC is only

recognised by Turkey and has hardly any assistance from other countries in its economic development. To be more precise, the Cypriot Muslims have their back pitted against the wall. No doubt, the international community has an important role to play in such a humanitarian cause.

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