

## AL's welcome step

Letter to foreign envoys embarrassing

At long last, Awami League has decided to play its role in the parliamentary standing committees. The move comes more than two and a half years into the five-year term of the eighth Jatiya Sangsad, and effectively almost a year after the actual formation of the standing committees in 2003. A parliament approaching nearly two-thirds of its tenure obviously lost out on answerability, transparency and accountability of an elected government, which are of the essence in a democracy, without a full-fledged committee system in place. After all, the so-called vital committees constituted during the last year's budget session were an apology for a committee system, because the opposition was no part of it. That meant only one thing: standing committees are worth very little if they work as rubber-stamp bodies of the ruling party; either they function as bipartisan entities or they don't. There is no half-way house about committee-work. And, regardless of the same-side mock fights simulated in whatever committees we have had, *sans* opposition participation, they were virtual show-pieces.

In this backdrop, nothing could be more welcome than the opposition AL providing names of its MPs to chief whip Delwar Hossain for incorporation in the 45 JS standing committees. The ball is now in the ruling party's court. The opposition has dovetailed its earlier demand for chairmanship of at least ten committees to their main overture of placing names on the committees. But principally the opposition's mind seems made up on the question of ending their boycott of committees which sounds but only logical as a natural extension of their earlier decision to join parliament and play a hands-on role on the floor of the House.

On the important question of the opposition chairing some of the vital oversight committees, we have been consistently of the view that such berths should be given to the opposition for the sake of ensuring balanced lawmaking, and transparency and accountability of governance. As a matter of fact, conceding such an accommodation would set a precedent, although this is prevalent as a standard practice in well-established democracies, for any opposition party in the future to benefit by.

That's all very good; but we are baffled by the fact that 43 letters have been written to as many diplomatic missions in Dhaka 'explaining' AL's stand on the issue. Why should the opposition party of a sovereign country send missive to foreign envoys to convey a certain sense of reservation about something they have otherwise positively decided upon? As well as undercutting self-respect it must have caused embarrassment to the diplomatic community. The AL whip claimed that they were entitled to be doing so because the ruling party leaders had 'complained' of their abstention from committees to the foreign missions. Even if the latter is true, 'two wrongs don't make something right'. We should give a better account of solving our own problems.

## Relief to flood victims

Roll up sleeves, no time to lose

FLOODS are rapidly engulfing us. The number of affected districts has almost doubled within a span of a few days. Sylhet has already seen an unprecedented level of inundation. The Meghna and Jamuna basins have been swelling at an alarming rate, with the other basin Padma yet to heave to a similar level.

Now, the surging water is posing an alarming threat to the capital. According to flood forecasters, low-lying areas of Dhaka and Narayanganj are likely to be inundated in a few days' time. The authorities need to take contingency measures like pumping out the water from the low-lying areas to avoid any catastrophe. The disaster management and relief ministry seems to have been overtaken by the speed of flooding. The forecasting mechanism has been seized of the imminent danger rather belatedly. We wonder if the flood information sharing arrangement between India and Bangladesh has been working well!

Reports of inadequacy of relief materials in the affected areas as well as thousands of people being marooned have been pouring in. The authorities should take immediate steps to alleviate the miseries of people reeling under difficult circumstances. At first, all those who are marooned in far-flung areas need to be evacuated to safety as quickly as possible. Then, an adequate number of relief camps should be opened so as to provide the affected people with safe drinking water, food and medicine. As we have seen in the past, epidemics tend to spread quite fast when water begins to recede. Medical teams, well-stocked with oral saline sachets, water purification tablets, medicines and vaccines, must be immediately dispatched to the affected areas. To repair the breaches in the embankments and restore the disrupted communication links we might need the Army's help, sooner perhaps than later.

# The debate on declaration of independence



AMM SHAWKAT ALI

**D**URING the last few days, the talk of the town is the controversy over the declaration of independence. The controversy stemmed from the recently published 15-volume history of Bangladesh's independence. The publication was done by the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MLWA) and not by the Ministry of Information (MOI) in whose domain the responsibility of any government publication lies. According to the Allocation of Business among different Ministries and Divisions, MOI is vested with the authority of administration of the press and regulation of the Books Act, and Newspaper Act. MLWA is a newborn Ministry having been created by the alliance government after it assumed office in the second half of 2001. It is not known if the responsibility of the administration of 'Books Act', a term used in Schedule I of the Rules of Business, 1996, was vested with the newly formed MLWA.

There are reasons to doubt if it was so vested with the authority. This is because the publication by MLWA has led to a writ petition in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. The aggrieved party

is said to be Haqqani Publication, which claims the copyright of 15-volume anthology on our War of Liberation, the work of which started way back in 1982.

Certain facts of history remain immutable not only because facts are facts and not fictions, but also because of the widespread acceptance of such facts by all and sundry. Denial of facts as facts amounts to indulging in travesty of truth; more

who was closely associated with War of Liberation and also served in the Cabinet of the then government.

Informed sources dismiss the idea of any original copy being in anybody's personal possession. According to this view, it is more a fiction than a fact primarily because this is in the nature of an after-thought. If it were true, what prevented the Minister from making it public way back in 1975-1981 when

instead of joining the War of Liberation, allowed himself to be arrested and wanted a political settlement. These are wild and imaginary ramblings of distorted minds. The best way to look at it is to say that Sheikh Mujib, in doing what he did, behaved more like a leader than anything else. He had deep and abiding faith in the independence of Bangladesh, which is reflected first by his six-point programme and later

gladesh, provides details of the validity of declaration of independence by Sheikh Mujib. He quotes not only independent academics like Professor Rounaq Jahan but also freedom fighters. In addition, Ahmed quotes from Holiday (May 5, 1989), which ranks Ziaur Rahman as the fourth announcer. Further, Ahmed rests his argument in favour of Sheikh Mujib, providing quotations from the banner headlines of

Taufiq Imam, in his recently published book *Bangladesh Government, 1971* also provides adequate information about the authenticity of declaration of independence by Sheikh Mujib. Taufiq Imam was the Cabinet Secretary of the exile government and also later till August, 1975.

There are many facts not so much about declaration of independence but about announcements by such well-respected personalities like Maulana Bhasani and other student leaders of 1971. A discerning reader of history must be able to distinguish between a formal declaration of independence by a political leader who commands respect of the people and has countrywide public acceptance as well as international acceptance and others who make either broadcast or other forms of announcement.

The declaration of independence by Sheikh Mujib, later built into the Proclamation of Independence, is what matters. It is on the basis of Proclamation of Independence on April 10, 1971, that the people's struggle for independence took definite shape followed by international support that eventually led to the birth of Bangladesh. All said and done, it seems a terrible waste of time to pull the undisputed leader down and push another leader up in this controversial and meaningless debate. At the end of the day, one must realise that declaration of independence is too serious a business to be left to anybody other than a highly popular leader of public opinion which, doubtless, Sheikh Mujib was.

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## WORTH A LOOK

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so when settled and accepted facts are overlooked and attempts are made to twist facts for narrow political ends. Additionally, such distortions take place after a lapse of three decades or more.

This is exactly what the eminent jurist Dr. Kamal Hossain has said (*Prothom Alo*, July 11, 2004). Expressing his personal view, Dr. Hossain is reported to have said that the declaration of independence, as part of the constitution, is the main basis of our constitution.

As if to add fuel to the fire, a senior Minister of the government claimed that he has in his personal possession one original copy of the declaration of independence, which does not contain any reference to the declaration of independence on March 26, 1971. This claim has been rejected by another leading lawyer

he was in the Cabinet. In fact, during Ziaur Rahman era, no such claims were made by anybody, let alone Ziaur Rahman himself.

On the other hand, it is also a fact that Ziaur Rahman did make a radio broadcast in Chittagong. A senior citizen, in his late seventies during his daily morning walk told his fellow walkers that he heard this himself but part of the statement also referred to the fact that 'Sheikh Mujib is with us.' The gentleman further asserts that immediately on the following morning after the announcement of Ziaur Rahman, Sheikh Mujib was shown under the custody of Pakistan Government in Karachi airport. This was evidently done to show that Sheikh Mujib was not in the then Bangladesh.

Questions have also been raised by some quarters that Sheikh Mujib,

by his historic declaration of March 7, 1971. This was his finest hour and his declaration on that day galvanised the whole of Bangladesh and started the process of people's war against occupation forces.

### Views of authentication body members

The distorted version presently inserted has been opposed by an eminent member of the Committee Professor Emajuddin Ahmed. Majority of the members of the authentication body of the first edition of the history of liberation also castigated the attempt to distort facts.

### Other views from independent sources

Borhanuddin Ahmed, in his book, *The Generals of Pakistan and Ban-*

both the *Times* and the *Guardian* of London dated March 27, 1971. Part of the quoted text reads:

"Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the acknowledged leader of Bengali nationalism responded heroically to the Pakistan Army's intervention with a call for resistance and a declaration of independence.... There is good evidence that most members of the Bengali Regiments will accept his orders."

"Shortly before his arrest, Mujib had issued a proclamation to his people, which informed them: You are citizens of a free country... Today the West Pakistan's military force is engaged in a genocide in Bangladesh... Our struggle is most rewarding. Certain is our victory. Allah is with us. The world public opinion is with us. *Joy Bangla* [Victory to Bengal]."

# Two steps forward, one step back: UPA's first 50 days



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

made certain questionable personnel appointments.

The CMP's dilution was apparent in President Kalam's Address to Parliament. This contained notable departures: on employment guarantee, food security, disinvestment, and foreign policy.

Some CMP commitments were subordinated to "resource availability" -- as if this were an unchangeable given. The promise of 100 days' work to one able-bodied person in

the Nation was a long-overdue return to the discourse of equity and empowering the poor. It was a *powerful appeal for equal opportunity*.

However, Dr Singh was subdued on pluralism and secularism. He didn't mention Gujarat -- although his is the first secular Central government after the pogrom. He dropped any reference to Palestine/Israel.

The Planning Commission has inducted excellent people like

Sivakumar and Madhav Chavan to the National Advisory Council on the CMP. But there's also Mr Jairam Ramesh who, ideologically, could have been with the BJP.

Foreign Minister Natwar Singh rightly met 80 different ambassadors in his very first month. Mr Jaswant Singh had time mainly for the US, and refused to receive a single African ambassador in 5 years! Yet, conservatism dominates the Foreign Office. Our policy on

is incompatible with the Constitution. The UPA should have replaced them with non-partisan people. Regrettably, it didn't.

Dr Singh must correct course by following the Sarkaria guidelines for future appointments. But he must not flinch from surgically excising communal influences from the body-politic.

Among the institutions that demand ruthless cleansing are AIR-Doordarshan, the Sahitya, Sanggeet-

The Law Commission is full of *Hindutva* admirers. Its Mahimath report wants to abolish the fundamental "innocent-unless-proved-guilty" principle. The report must be scrapped.

The government shouldn't drag its feet on detoxifying AIR-Doordarshan either.

Take foreign policy imbalances. The government recently welcomed the American Jewish Committee which lobbies for Israel's policy of ending the "dream of Palestinian nationhood". It must correct this by opposing Israel's annexation of Palestinian territory. It must not recognise Iraq's farcically "sovereign" regime.

Dr Singh must himself seize the initiative. He has made welcome moves -- through his Address and his first visit to Andhra, where he announced aid for farmers in distress. Ten years ago, he was unmoved at the plight of weavers, also driven to suicide.

Dr Singh can set a brilliant personal example. He is remarkably austere. He once took pride in possessing only one formal suit. He has decided to give away the two obnoxiously expensive BMWs allotted to him, each costing Rs one crore. He will drive an Ambassador, like all Indian PMs did, barring the self-indulgent Mr Vajpayee.

He should auction off all six BMWs ordered by Vajpayee & Co to flaunt their tawdry *nouveau riche* taste. But that's not enough. Wield the knife, Doctor!

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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"every rural, urban poor and lower-middle class household" was diluted to cover rural households alone. "Food security" disappeared altogether. The original CMP *categorically* ruled out privatisation of profitable public enterprises. The Address did so "generally".

Similarly, the CMP's promise of greatly expanding the Public Distribution System was watered down. It would only be "strengthened" in backward areas.

Instead of reiterating "India's decades-old commitment" to a Palestinian "homeland", as the CMP did *without* mentioning Israel, the Address upheld "legitimate aspirations" of the Palestinians, but stressed "beneficial" relations with Israel.

Dr Manmohan Singh's Address to

Professors Abhijit Sen and Bhalchandra Mungekar, and Syeda Hamid. But it's headed by the conservative Montek Singh Ahluwalia, and includes Kirit Parikh, who argued for *expanding* the gold-plated Enron project after first opposing it!

The new Home Secretary has sterling qualities. But take the National Security Advisory Board. Convenor S.K. Lambah is a highly-regarded diplomat. Mr N.C. Saxena and Hamid Ansari are worthy members. But it includes journalists C. Raja Mohan and Manoj Joshi, known for hawkish pro-NDA views. Raja Mohan is the media's worst pro-US apologist.

The government has named outstanding members like Aruna Roy, Jean Dreze, Mirai Chatterjee, AK

Nepal, now all but collapsing on our borders, remains disastrously pro-monarchy.

So far, "detoxification", promised in key institutions, has been earnestly practised only by the Human Resources Development Ministry.

The Centre removed four Governors on the ground that they are RSS cadres. Two-thirds of our 35 Governors are indeed hardcore BJP/RSS leaders. But that's not an adequate reason for sacking them: the RSS isn't banned. The true rationale is that most are *partisan-political* and unfit for the job.

Many Governors helped the BJP during the elections. Some shamelessly promoted *Hindutva* -- through *Ramkatha* recitals in Raj Bhavans -- or interfered with appointments. Their continuation

Natak and Lalit-Kala Akademis, National Museums, Archaeological and Anthropological Surveys. Equally, the state must stop subsidising Swadeshi Jagaran Manch-sponsored Centre for Bharatiya Marketing Development and other *sangh* fronts.

The UPA must tackle statutory bodies packed with communal or incompetent nominees. The National Commission on Minorities failed to act on the butchery of Muslims in Gujarat, or on textbooks which describe religious minorities as a "problem".

The BJP-packed National Commission on Women whitewashed Gujarat's explicitly sexual violence. It's less concerned with women's rights than glorifying women's status in ancient India.

## OPINION

# Growing with your children

SHAHNAZ YASIN ANDALEEB

**G**ROWING up is a process; "learning" to grow is a more subtle and sophisticated process. And learning to grow with your children is by no means an easy task; they do not come with any manuals. Nor do the same standards apply to different children though they may belong to the same family and are exposed to the same background stimuli (environment).

Each child is born with her or his own unique, intrinsic quality and characteristics which sets her or him apart from the siblings.

The first job of a parent is to recognise this and to respect and celebrate the distinctiveness of each child. The failure to acknowledge and accept this would be to fail our children in a way. Having raised two daughters, we have first-hand experience of this. After settling daughter No. 1 in college we thought we were ready to handle daughter No. 2. Were we wrong? No. 2 came with her own set of rules: very few of the older rules applied and we had to re-learn the whole process again, custom-designed according to the needs of the time!

Life teaches us in many ways and on many levels where age alone does not necessarily mean wisdom as is commonly claimed. Wisdom comes with age, maturity, perception, knowledge, and reflection on different realities.

A wise parent plays many roles and must be willing to wear many hats. When the children are very young, parents are the guides, the teachers, and the mentors. At this stage the children see the world as we present it to them and they accept the values that we imbue in them. Their minds are like sponges and absorb what-

ever is given to them.

But this phase changes as soon as the children are also busy with their own process of growth while interacting with external forces and dealing with peer pressure. As they get older the process of sifting, questioning, judging, and re-evaluating begins. The challenge now is whether we want to be stuck in time or move on with the flow of life on an uncharted journey with our children.

This journey means adapting to changes, understanding a different reality, and trying also to see the world through the eyes of our children. It means expanding our perspective of life and yet maintaining a balance between the old and the new, discarding some old ideas while re-strengthening others where necessary.

Life goes on. Rules change. Situations change. Mindsets change. There can be no progress without change. That's the ultimate reality. Keeping the core values intact, there should be room to explore, to grow, to reinvent, and to discover.

Children will want to spread their wings in their quest for adventure and knowledge, and for the realization of their selves and this must be encouraged. As Khalil Gibran said, "You are the bows from which your children are sent forth." We as parents "must relinquish [our] children to the fortunes of life with gladness, for life smiles on those that are flexible, flexibility being a form of stability."

For parents the act of relinquishing is not easy, for it needs self-analysis, retrospection, belief in one's self and one's children, and a willingness to forego the ego!

Speaking from personal experience and having raised daughters abroad, we have had to re-learn many

things and see them in a renewed way. It was a constant challenge and we had to be vigilant, aware, be in their faces, out of their faces, in their world, out of their world, and inform and educate ourselves all the time. Coming from our culture into a new one, trying to hold on to our heritage, and at the same time helping our daughters to be well adjusted in their society without losing their identity, demanded constant evaluating and reassessing of our beliefs and ideas, and again, learning and growing with them. Changing contexts also demanded some changes in our own beliefs and assumptions: This is true of any place any time.

When parents take the effort to see the world through the eyes of their children, it is with renewed vigor that children will accept the norms set by their parents and respect the parameters set for them.

This learning process never ends. The perceptive parent realizes that the core values remain the same, but how you apply it and how you interpret it may differ according to the personalities of each child. As parents, it has been an exciting, challenging, adventurous, and a joyous experience for us. It has been a reawakening with each child as life evolved from different perspectives. Our two daughters have broadened our horizons for us as we hope we have broadened theirs. In spite of all the hair-tearing, heart-wrenching, soul-searching, and agonizing moments that have also been part of the process, it has all been worthwhile, especially now, when they are grown up and look at us with twinkle in their eyes, a hint of laughter, and a tacit approval in their voices to say, "Hey Ammu, Abbu, you did have a point!" or "Yes, you were right!" This can really happen if you play your cards right and learn to grow with your children!

Shahnaz Yasin Andaleeb writes from Erie, Pennsylvania, USA.

# Children of expatriate parents

ERSHAD KHANDKER

**"M**AMA, Amake pani nie ani!" This is a Bangla sentence spoken by a nephew of mine during his annual sojourn to Dhaka. The expatriate child is trying to ask her mom to bring a glass of water and has done so in Bangla, but a literal translation of the sentence to English is almost impossible because of the wrong choice of words. The same child now speaks very good Bangla despite never having lived in Bangladesh. This is possible because his mother is a strict and uncompromising parent, taking command of the child's colloquial speech like a benevolent dictator and ensuring that the importance of speaking in one's mother tongue is understood. But we know that in most expatriate families children speak Bangla with a pronounced accent. They become Westernised, since they live in the West. This is quite understandable. Or should there be a little less Westernisation? This question has never quite seen a fair intellectual conclusion in my own mind. Do the children of Bangladeshi expatriates contribute toward development of their mother country? Do they remain interested? My own gut feeling is one of sadness and the conclusion veers towards the negative.

There is no study or data from which we could make an idea about the feelings of the children of expatriate Bangladeshis toward their mother country. I could look at the state of my own family and try to make a

value judgment. The intention here, from my own side, is to look at this dispassionately and make some observations simply because I do love this country and feel that we need the help of expert manpower and also investment, that other countries like India seem to count for granted. The expatriate communities of Indian origin keeps a visceral contact with their mother country and do so culturally as well as economically with inward FDI (foreign direct investment) coming from people who hold citizenship of other countries. This I know from personal experience and via the print media and television.

Every person has a right to go to another country in search of better education and economic prospect. This has been done so from centuries and in all continents of the world. A dilemma arises when the migrant, being the product of so many generations suddenly decides to sever all meaningful contact with the mother country. The money spent on him by the mother country becomes a failed investment, even more than that, the natural genealogy is broken depriving the mother nation of the chance to profit from the dreams planted so many generations back. The loss is cumulative as the same people then do not give their children enough option to learn about their homeland, so that they could retain an interest or even choose to make a journey back. If this journey back does not materialise, the mother country is losing revenue and other contributions of the subjective and objective kind.

The expatriate Bangladeshi community does show a proclivity to retain contact with their country. Recently, there has been some investment in the hotel and hospitality business by returning Bangladeshis. But the great many children of skilled doctors, engineers and business graduates remain aloof from the interest of the country. And the chances of these people being lost to another country are high. A survey of my own family shows a definite tilt toward staying in the West. The children of my six sisters, who have different family names then my own have a stronger penchant for the West than the children of my brothers. I do fear that. As migration of people bearing my family name increases so would the rate of people gone missing.

The talented would go to another country to try and make their talent flourish. The terrible state of our traffic and law and order forces people to stay away. The fact remains that the lure of Western culture is changing people in all parts of the world. In this scenario, one cannot expect those who are already in the West to leave everything behind and come back! But my own desire is to have at least a minimum percentage of reverse migration, in par in percentage point with India at least. That would show that we care and that development of Bangladesh will take place just a little faster.

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