

## Gazipur people have spoken

### A triumph of the electoral process

THE Gazipur by-election, which the AL candidate has won, is a clear reflection of the local people's regard and sympathy for the slain politician, Ahsanullah Master. It has been a vote of protest -- a protest against political violence. People have spoken in a very clear language and succeeded in getting the message across that they want politics to be free from terrorism of any kind.

It has not been blighted by controversy like the Dhaka-10 by-poll. Indeed, certain features of the Gazipur by-election merit appreciation. There was a good turnout despite the floods which affected a large number of people in the area. People are always ready to do their bit in upholding the electoral process. Then there has been a very welcome development in that the defeated four-party alliance candidate accepted the results without any demur. We believe such acceptance is absolutely necessary in a democratic setting. The candidates have shown a measure of political maturity and spirit of accommodation which should be an object lesson for other politicians on either side of the divide.

The election passed off peacefully, which -- strange though it may sound -- is no mean achievement in our context, given the violent brand of politics we have been witness to. This shows that if the EC does its job and the law and order concerns are addressed adequately, the people come out spontaneously to exercise their right of franchise. They braved the natural calamity and performed as a responsible electorate in a very commendable manner. The EC which faced sharp criticism after the Dhaka-10 by-election is in a better position to realise what it needs to do for holding a good elections.

The political parties have a vital role to play in keeping the democratic process functional and thriving. The issue is relevant, as we have witnessed too many incidents in the recent past that eroded public confidence in the by-electoral processes. But the Gazipur poll stands out as a bright example of how a by-poll should be held.

## Doha Round back on track

### But much remains to be resolved

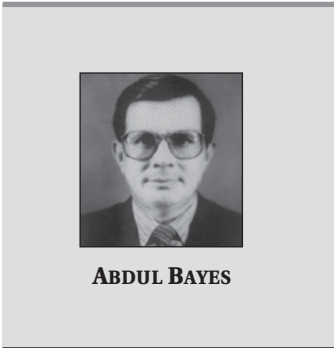
THE good news is that the 147 nations of the WTO were able to strike a crucial deal at Geneva on Sunday that salvaged and reinvigorated the Doha Round of negotiations, begun in 2001 but bogged down in dissension following the debacle in Cancun last year. The bad -- or more sobering -- news is that, despite the framework that has been agreed to by the member states laying down the guidelines for debate, many concerns of the LDC countries were left unaddressed, and there are many issues that still fall far short of resolution.

The deal that was struck by the member states promises to address the issues of farm subsidies in the developed world and the opening of industrial markets, both of which were issues of top priority for the developing countries. It was primarily the developed countries' refusal to countenance the elimination of their farm subsidies that led to the failure of the negotiations in Cancun last year, and the fact that key members such as the US and the EU have finally agreed, in principle at least, to address these concerns, is a marked improvement from the high-handed and hypocritical stance taken by them in Cancun.

There still remain some notable omissions from the perspective of Bangladesh and other LDCs. Preferential market access and the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers, both issues of long-standing concern for Dhaka, were not the focus of the talks, and thus any agreement that is ultimately reached is unlikely to be in our best national interest. In addition to this, one must add the caveat that these are only two of the many thorny issues that remain unresolved, and that agreeing to a framework for talks is not the same thing as reaching agreement on the substance of the talks.

Nevertheless, the recent agreement is an encouraging first step. The simple fact of the matter is that it is no longer possible to live in a world without rules governing transnational trade, and that gridlock and discord benefit no one. The framework drawn up may not be ideal, but is better than no framework at all, and the tenor of the WTO talks since Cancun shows that the developed world has finally understood that it can no longer ride roughshod over the rest of us with impunity.

# Floods to wane, woes to remain



ABDUL BAYES

WITHIN a span of six years or so, the devastations are at our door steps. The country is faced with devastating floods inundating 40 out of 64 districts, including two-thirds of the capital city. Already as flood waters recede, 50-60 people are reported to have died of diarrhoea in less than 24 hours. The total human lives lost is reported to have neared one thousand. The seed beds that farmers prepared for the ensuing *aman* production went under water. The estimated losses on account of infrastructure and industrial production are yet to come out, but a preliminary exercise puts the total losses at Taka 40 thousand crores. This would mean that about 5 per cent of the GDP has been affected by the running floods.

**Fait accompli and fettered fate**

The causes of floods are known to us -- some are nature-made and some are man-made. Floods are occasional phenomena in this part of the world

and since most of our rivers flow from other countries upstream, flood control measures here might mitigate some of the rot, not all. That flood is a *fait accompli* for Bangladesh is now a well established fact. Therefore, as experts informed us, Bangladesh will have to learn to live with floods. But learning is the least that we tend to live with. As I drive home from Dhaka towards Jahangirnagar University campus and crossing Amin Bazar, I annoyedly notice that the vast areas of

tend to keep floods free of furiousness. The water bodies have been environment friendly. While the present government denied access to a private company for building housing complex in the water bodies of Ashulia, within a span of two years or so, the same government permitted three to four companies to build housing complexes in the places that I mentioned before. Very soon, I suppose, we shall have to pass by multistoried cosy buildings both on the left and the right

then government of Awami League managed the post-flood operations quite well that earned applause from across the world. Undeniably, the then management defied the forecast that millions of people would go hungry and the country would face a famine. It has been proved at that time that all that is needed in the hour of crisis are political commitments and judicious planning.

**Realities of 2004**

## BENEATH THE SURFACE

So far so bad. But the government has to keep an eye on the forecast made by experts. It is expected that another spell of flood might ravage the country in August. That means, given the forecast is right, the aman crop that has to be in the field by that time might be adversely affected. And till the next boro crop gets home, food security of farmers might be at a stake. The government needs to place the options on the table and start working out the modalities from now.

water bodies on the left side of the highway being filled in for the construction of housing complexes. It would seem that all that we call "growth" and "development" are taking place there, day and night. Barges are pouring barrels of sands and soils everyday to quickly complete the construction of complexes. The "success stories" of the "invisible hands" becoming visible everyday.

I simply wonder how could a government, worth a feeling for the nation, permit housing hunters encroach upon such natural water bodies that

side of the road denying us of a drop of water to watch but, possibly, forcing us to wait for deepest floods to come. Even proponents of market economics and private sector development would shiver to see such a development.

And throughout Bangladesh, in the name of flood protections, unplanned construction of barrages and embankments are, in fact, inviting floods. Much has have been written on that.

**Lessons from 1998**

The 1998-flood is termed as the most unprecedented in our history, inflicting heavy tolls on our economy. The

But this time, things do not seem to run that way. From the very beginning, the government made a serious mistake by not taking the forecast for flood seriously. The "mockery" on mounting misery started when some influential members of the cabinet dubbed the devastation as a media campaign to turn the images of the government. The second mistake relates to politicisation of relief operations. Newspaper reports point to the fact that relief materials mostly went as per political patronage rather than painful needs. The government-backed organisations started earning a pie out of the perilous

situations. Various social, cultural and religious organisations are being denied their services to the people with mounting miseries. Everywhere, allegedly, relief materials were far short of the needs. The most important lapse is that the government left out Proshika -- an NGO that contributed most to the alleviation of human miseries during the 1998 -- from its list of NGOs to be entrusted or appealed to come forward with their resources. This also indicates to what extent politics presides over the

pains of the poor.

**Looking ahead**

So far so bad. But the government has to keep an eye on the forecast made by experts. It is expected that another spell of flood might ravage the country in August. That means, given the forecast is right, the *aman* crop that has to be in the field by that time might be adversely affected.

And till the next *boro* crop gets home, food security of farmers might be at a stake. The government needs to place the options on the table and start working out the modalities from now.

The post-flood rehabilitation programmes need to be cost effective as well as pro-poor so that exchange entitlements are not lost. Again, the 1998-lessons should be borne in mind.

**Use of scarce resources**

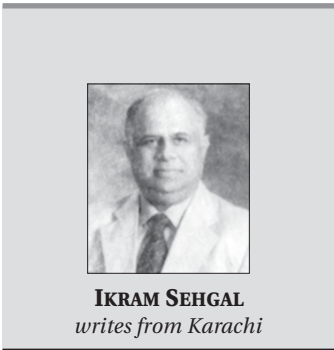
There are many amongst us who like to fry their potatoes from the fire that burnt the houses. The government needs to be careful in assessing the losses due to floods. From our experience in the past, it should not be surprising that the influential parties, especially those with political links, might try to draw the sympathy despite no devastations. The floods should not be an excuse, unless warranted by close scrutiny, for waivers. Resources should go to the marginal and poor farmers; to the cottage and small enterprises and to those who are reeling under the ravages of floods. Remember, crises are opportunities lost for some, but opportunities opened up for others.

**Reeling with receding**

Experience with past floods tell us that human miseries might mount after the recession of the flood water. Various types of diseases might break out following the lack of safe drinking water and sanitary outlets. Medical teams, both private and public, should remain vigilant on this side. Newspaper reports suggest that the availability of men and medicine are far short of the requirement. We can only expect that the health ministry of the government keeps a close eye on this.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

# Peace breaks out in South Asia?



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

THERE seems to be a genuine thaw in the relationship between India and Pakistan, a far cry from the early days of 2002 when there was eyeball-to-eyeball military confrontation with a likelihood of use of nuclear weapons. The latest event of note was Gen Pervez Musharraf's meeting with the visiting Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh, who was in Islamabad to attend the SAARC Ministers Conference. Despite a discordant note when the Pakistani President asked for a reasonable time-frame for the peace talks in the face of the Indians not wanting the talks to be time-constrained, there seems to be a grudging but definite mutual building of trust.

Hosting 20 per cent of all humanity in the world, South Asia occupies only 3.3 per cent of the global area. Despite a climate of political complexity, religious divide and ethnic polarisation, significant development in some fields is a living testament to the dynamism of South Asians. Regretfully when compared to the vast population, human development is negligible, poverty being both a cause and consequence. Relations between India and her South Asian neighbours, particularly Pakistan, has often been strained, the core issue of Kashmir resulting in three wars between Pakistan and India, besides some ongoing conflicts like Siachen. With such conflicts South Asia will continue to live in poverty, backwardness and the endless sense of

insecurity that goes with it. A just and durable peace between India and Pakistan is necessary for progress and development in South Asia.

India saw an opportunity after 9/11 to coerce Islamabad into complying with its demands. Soon after the attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001, New Delhi increased allegations of cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. With a "final solution" in mind on December 19

(2) Pakistan responded positively, former Prime Minister Jamali announcing on November 23, 2003 a unilateral ceasefire along the Line of Control (LOC) while expressing a willingness to start a bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffa-rabad.

(3) Though suffering far more economically India had banned overflights after the attack on its Parliament, on November 30, 2003 President Musharraf announced unilateral

Chambers of Commerce and Industry in New Delhi to strengthen trade, technological and industrial cooperation.

(8) In March 2004 India began a first full cricket tour after 14 years, sparking huge interest amongst millions of fans on both sides.

(9) Pakistani and Indian military officials signed agreement on March 27, 2004 to curb cross-border smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal

ation.

While there is great expectancy in the air, one must be cautious. Hawkish elements on both sides of the border having a vested interest in sabotaging all moves for peace will strive to hamper the process. The leaders of India and Pakistan have recently demonstrated an extraordinary understanding of each other's problems, the will for peace and determination thereof are more important than deterrence.

## AS I SEE IT

While peace in South Asia depends upon peace between India and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are also stakeholders, their governments making collective efforts to improve their socio-economic conditions through democratic means. The extent of human deprivation in South Asia is colossal. About 260 million people lack access to rudimentary health facilities; 337 million lack safe drinking water; 830 million have no access to basic sanitation facilities and over 400 million go hungry each day.

India launched "Operation Parakram" (valour), the largest and longest-ever mobilisation of the Indian Armed Forces on Pakistan's borders. Amidst the global "war on terror" this threat of the use of force against Pakistan was a very deliberate move. Further increasing the pressure, New Delhi downgraded its diplomatic relations with Pakistan, ending all transportation linkages and economic relations. In an astute move Pakistan did not recall its High Commissioner, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi remaining at his post for the next four months despite being deliberately ignored by the Indian government.

Former Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee offered a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan in a landmark address in April 2003 in Occupied Kashmir, this after several months of tension saw the two nuclear powers come close to war. Vajpayee said that dialogue was the only way to bring peace. Thereafter peace moves accelerated, viz (1) October 2003 when India elaborated 12 steps to normalise relations with Pakistan.

resumption of all flights with India.

(4) President Musharraf stated in December 2003 that the two countries should start a dialogue accepting the importance and centrality of the Kashmir dispute, eliminating the solutions unacceptable to Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir, going for a solution acceptable to all parties.

(5) Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Pakistan on January 6, 2004 for the SAARC conference in Islamabad, holding on the sidelines one-on-one meetings with President Musharraf and PM Jamali. In a major breakthrough both countries agreed to initiate the process of a composite dialogue to resolve problems including the peaceful settlement of all issues. Aroadmap for peace talks was agreed subsequently upon on February 18, 2004, an aggressively rapid plan for peace talks on contentious issues like Kashmir, terrorism and nuclear weapons to put a history of acrimony behind them.

(7) An MOU was signed on February 26, 2004 between Pakistan and Indian

immigration.

(10) In May 2004 the new Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh took over and reiterated his commitment to the on-going peace process by pledging top priority to India-Pakistan peacetalks.

(11) On June 2004 India and Pakistan renewed a ban on nuclear weapons tests, setting up a hot-line to alert each other to potential nuclear risks.

(12) Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri and his Indian counterpart Natwar Singh agreed on June 23, 2004 mutually to re-open Karachi and Bombay Consulates while restoring size of their Embassies in Delhi and Islamabad to full strength of 110.

(13) A schedule for talks was announced in July 2004 with India on six of the eight subjects on the composite dialogue framework, viz (i) Wullar Barrage, (ii) friendly exchange of artists, journalists and parliamentarians, (iii) Siachen, (iv) Sir Creek dispute, (v) terrorism and drug trafficking and (vi) economic and commercial cooper-

The negative role played by the media, giving out versions of events that are totally wrong and unjustified, does give a cause for concern. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) will have to be an on-going process to decrease tensions amongst former rivals. A continuing process of dialogue and interaction at various levels of the government will allow removal of irritants that may arise.

SAARC's potential to live upto the expectations of the peoples of South Asia has been quite successful at the functional level. The 12<sup>th</sup> Summit held in Islamabad, January 4-6, 2004 resulted in better understanding among the regional countries, with all member nations realising that this was the time for action, forward thrust and real achievements for the region breaking out of its stagnation. South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) lays the foundation of a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) and goes a long way in increasing trade opportunities, particularly for the smaller countries in the region. SAARC must be

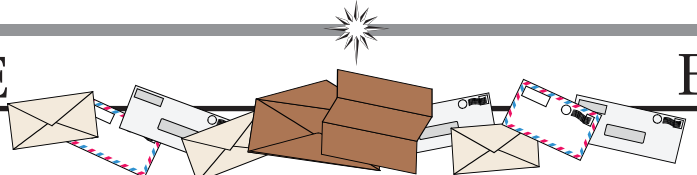
given an added role as a mediator to resolve regional problems by mutual consent of the concerned members. Although the Association's charter does not allow the raising of bilateral disputes at its meetings, its potential for acting as a peace broker cannot be denied.

The steps for peace in South Asia include viz (1) the pragmatism of its respective leaders initiating a process of meaningful discussions, resulting in the productive engagement between India and Pakistan, dramatically changing the situation from that obtaining 30 months ago so; (2) efforts for a just and fair resolution of disputes; (3) facilities of safe and cheap travel by land for the people to visit each other's country, and (4) reducing the influence of hawkish elements, exercising their writ far too long they have seriously hampered many previous attempts aimed at peace in the region.

While peace in South Asia depends upon peace between India and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are also stakeholders, their governments making collective efforts to improve their socio-economic conditions through democratic means, attempts often frustrated by the background of colonial rule and societies beset by extraordinary religious, ethnic and linguistic complexity. The extent of human deprivation in South Asia is colossal. About 260 million people lack access to rudimentary health facilities; 337 million lack safe drinking water; 830 million have no access to basic sanitation facilities and over 400 million go hungry each day. The governments of the two countries must take up the challenge and ensure that having taken the first meaningful steps towards possible durable peace, the momentum is maintained. Pragmatism, flexibility and political will can usher in a new era of peace in the region and prosperity for the impoverished millions who inhabit South Asia.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Bar campus politics

Last year I passed from Notre Dame College where I had never seen single political poster. But now I have to see at least two or three political procession at DU campus. Different political party hold their meetings with loud speaker in front of "Kola Bhabon". 'Kola Bhabon' area is called the center point of political gathering. University student could not find their seat officially at hall. They have to seek political support to find it. If a student finds a seat by political sponsor he or she became obliged to the concerned political leader. Dormitorian's have to take part in various political programs like political procession, meetings etc. It is ordered if hall students come to class in university, he has to meet with the political leaders at 12.30 p.m. in front of central library. Even at night when a student studying deeply, leaders may force him to response his order. After a level these hall students get involved in various prohibited works like snatching, abducting and taking drugs etc. Students from village or others who have to stay at hall are the worse affected. They come after

over coming a mammoth hurdle and with a lot of dream. But in this contrary atmosphere. They lost their way finally. Some talented students already lost their lie because of political clash in the campus, where it is supposed the safest arena for the students. I am not against good students politics. But I oppose campus politics. This is really poisoning the environment of study in every public university. I pray to government and opposition parties to ban politics in campus. Please ensure our good education environment in universities and let us study.

**Sifat Uddin**  
University of Dhaka.

### Appeal to PSC

First I would like to thank PSC for their timely and accurate decision regarding cancellation of the 25<sup>th</sup> BCS preliminary test examination scheduled for the 23th July, 2004 due to raging floods. But still a matter of distress is remaining. A lot of people have become frustrated as their admit cards have not reached in their hands and, on the other hand, their name is not in

the cancel list. So, we earnestly entreat the PSC to take steps to issue admit cards from its regional offices situated across the country on a temporary and emergency basis and make us highly grateful thereby.

**Hossain Md Noor**  
Chittagong

**English medium schools**

Recently there has been lot protests against unreasonable tuition and other fees charged by English medium schools. In this connection I would like to point out that two of the so-called high standard schools namely Scolastica and BIT were allotted huge land in Uttara by RAJUK at a very nominal price. The rationale of such generosity by RAJUK can be questioned when schools for poor and middle class are deplorably short. These two schools are serving the richest people and making money receiving land at throw away police. Civil society and their keepers should now rouse demand to get answer to the action of RAJUK and force there

schools to pay proper price for the land so that the money so obtained may be used to provide educational facilities for the poor and the middle class.

**Swapan Ahmed**  
Dhanmondi

**We are in a vicious circle**

We are the students of English department at Chittagong University. We entered this department with a lot of hope. But all of our hopes are going in vain. It seems to us, it will take years to complete our course. Our honorable teachers are very busy to take class in the private university.

For their cupidity of money, we have been suffering much. The students of first year have still reading in first year though they have already passed three years. Our teachers do not yet think of our such miserable condition. They take ten months to public result. We have come this greenery comings full of dreams but day by day we are going to face dismay.

**Anonymous**

*Dept. of English*  
Chittagong University

**Fixed wireless telephone**

It is good that at long last the elusive BTTB is launching the mobile telephone service from coming December, at cheaper rates.

But we never hear of fixed wireless telephone system. It means no incoming wiring from outside, and no internal wiring. The telephone set becomes cordless within a locality (short range). There are also no cables from the exchange, a huge saving in capital costs, and a relief on operation and maintenance budgets.

Its feasibility is not known to the writer of this letter, and information on its use and application in other LDCs is not easily available. It will not be popular in the developed countries, but may be cost-effective in under-developed countries for the middle class and the rural population. The big mobile operators would not advertise it. The circuitry should be much simpler than the standard mobile telephone, which has wide roaming

capabilities. The fixed wireless set is confined to a the limited radius around a subscriber's site. Can we have some more general information on this technology (if it exists at all)?

**A Husnain**  
Dhaka

**Naive Mayor!**

As a resident of Dhaka since the 1930s, I strongly question the naivety of the DCC Mayor in proposing self-assessment of plots and holdings in the metropolis. Why he is imitating the Western modes of the developed countries, where the literacy is almost 100 per cent and the standard of living very high?

The vast majority of the owners cannot fill in themselves these technical complicated forms, and have to run to others, who will make money out of these transactions. Why make things complicated?

Easy solution: make it an OPTION, not compulsory. Same problem with VAT book-keeping agitation. Who are advising the PM and the Cabinet? Let there be more transparency at the

higher levels of officialdom. The second class politicians have too much freedom to take dubious decisions on vital policy matters.

**A Mahseen**  
Dhaka

**Regulate the Eng med schools**

It is heartening to note that a group of guardians of the students in some English medium schools have joined together to campaign against the complete absence of regulations, and the regular and arbitrary increase in fees every year. Some have gone to the court to seek justice, and one court has issued show-cause notice (which is allegedly being disregarded, DS report July 21).

The government talks high on education and ignores the business mentality environment present in the informal private sector (schools, colleges, tutorial centers, Note books, part-time duty by teachers, etc). There are lacuna in the syllabi specially affecting local and national knowledge on history, sociology, culture and history. Most of the time the official

spokespersons concentrate on primary education (and lately on cheating on examinations). Money can silence noise!

Eng med education is extremely popular in the big cities, but the official attitude is worse than step-motherly! This not a single instance. There are similar booming business in other informal sectors not properly regulated: medical clinics, diag centers, hospitals, tutorial centers, publication of cheap text books, photocopied on cheap paper.

Development has two sides, as in a coin: the good side, to be developed; and the bad side, to be monitored for stern without delay. Why our inspection, regulatory and prosecution sides are weak? The answer is known unofficially to all!

Whip the honest and ignore the baddies? What the godmothers are doing? Politics has become a commission (percentage) business who know some day our dear country might be secretly sold out to foreigners?

**Abu Abad**  
Dhaka