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The nation can hardly conjure up the vision of a dialogue between the two top political leaders since 1990, when they took part in the movement against an autocratic ruler. That very political upheaval was due to the union of the all classes of people whose emotion coupled with indignation and hatred against the undemocratic gestures of the government of Ershad finally found expression in a mass movement. But since then the two major parties have never been able to maintain the relationship that people would like them to.

The opposition must have been unsettled by the recent incidents. But still there is no alternative to a fruitful dialogue with the government on important national issues.

A.B.M Shafiqul Islam
Deptt. Of English
J.U.

Cultural arena

There was a time when demand for stage play was not at all appreciable. A very small audience used to be seen in the cultural arena. But these days we are lucky enough that we could educate the people. The focal point of stage play, the Baily Road, is abuzz with play lovers. We have succeeded in our mission.

In 1971, our brave hearts could touch the target only by being united. This is not our solace, this is our lesson that nothing is impossible in this heaven and earth.

Nahid Afrin
Dhaka

GM foods

It was sad to read in The Daily Star that anti-GM hysteria is being stirred up in Bangladesh.

In his first paragraph, Mr. Abdali Dhaka ("Like to eat GM food?" Letters to Editor, October 9") tried to paint a scene like that with allusion to killer tomatoes and "...sinister coinage, Frankenfood to remind us of it." "A major war is being fought over the issue in Europe", he wrote. It is not quite a major war but rather a series of skirmishes. On the one side, he lists the "global giants" (the first one of which is actually seven times smaller than the UK's major supermarket chain) and "the governments they control".

Government leaders will be interested to know that they are controlled by seed producers because more commonly it is the oil companies who are said to hold the reigns of influence.

On the other side....but he neglects to mention the other side. It is certainly not the people of Europe. In Britain, for instance, serious in-depth studies have shown major consumer indifference to the whole issue (in one UK study last year some 75% of people said they did not even bother to read labels for GM content) as well as a clear influence of price; consumers often say they will buy if GM good are significantly cheaper. The lower the price, the more people would be willing to purchase.

In Germany earlier this year the effect of price advantage was put to the test. Customers who were offered loaves of bread and portions of French fries labelled "GM" at reduced prices bought them five and twenty times, respectively, more frequently than the supposed "non-GM" options (which were actually identical).

That other side ignored by Mr. Dhaka comprises chiefly the so-called "environmental" groups, those self-styled guardians of the public interest whose main concern appears to be their own aggrandisement through membership, money and influence. They claim to speak for the public but never seek their mandate. They are accompanied in their opposition by parts of the organic food-producing sector, concerned at losing some of their market share when better quality and cheaper GM foods reach the shelves.

With labelling legislation in place,

F28 landing

While landing in heavy downpour Biman's F28 aircraft with 82 passengers and crew skidded off the runway at Sylhet Osmani Airport on the morning of October 8 and hit the edge of a brook 200 ft away. If this hurdle of the brook was not there, the aircraft would have hit the boundary wall and burst into flames causing death to all on board due to burn and asphyxiation.

A committee has been formed under the leadership of CAAB Chairman and I would humbly suggest that the committee consider the following while conducting the investigation:

1. Was there any technical fault in the aircraft?
2. Was there any pressure created on the captain to operate the flight in inclement weather because some VIPs were travelling?
3. What was the former MD of Biman

doing in the cockpit during the critical landing of the aircraft which was against international regulations? As the flight was being operated in inclement weather all the way from Dhaka, all passengers, including the former MD, were supposed to be in their seats with seat belts fastened and this had to be checked and rechecked by the cabin crew.

4. Did the woman captain feel distracted due to the presence of a third person in the cockpit? Did she at any point of time decide to turn back the aircraft and not land due to poor visibility and was pressurised to make the attempt because some VIPs were on board who had important business in Sylhet? I do hope the committee report will be made public.

Anonymous, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Failed state?

Now it is beginning to become a fashion to debate whether Bangladesh is a failed state (DS Oct 8). It will continue unless the leaders wake up and stem the tide.

There are several types and grades of leadership in any society; some leading, some lagging, depending on the local trends. There are also pockets which are influential, and, ambitious. Some have high ideals and cannot be purchased; while some others are willing to compromise, for personal or temporary gains. It is human nature, and the spread is not uncommon in this part of the world.

When the going is not good or attractive (it applies both ways), even foreign predators watch to take advantage of the situation. In Dhaka, it happened once when the stock exchange crashed, or was made to crash deliberately. Now the guess is about imposing a puppet regime for ulterior motives. It is not a new idea, as it has occurred elsewhere, from time to time.

This type of contingency is likely to occur when there is erosion of moral values in society; and when powerful

foreign interests are interested in establishing bases or mechanisms of control.

South Asia is now increasingly under international watch as it is a huge potential market of one and a half billion people; plus the human and natural resources (including energy) available, tapped and untapped.

The huge arms catch at Ctg seaport (urea factory) is still unsolved, as also the bomb bursts at several public places. A mere one-man commission looked into the 21/8 carnage in Dhaka, and it faced non-cooperation from some of the victims (for gathering evidence). Non-transparency adds to suspicion and rumour-mongering.

This sort of situation will prevail when there is no consensus at the base root level. Today this nation is severely divided, and the citizens are the losers. They might lose the control of the country if there is no correction of attitude and approach for national unity. The arbitrators are fighting it out! There is no light at the end of the tunnel.

A Hussain, Dhaka

'In the name of Allah'?

The recent column titled as above by Brig. Gen. Jahangir Kabir, nds, psc. was an eye-catching one, to say the least. First of all, I would like to condemn the Beslan tragedy and those behind it. And I am not convinced that it was the Chechens.

But what saddens me is the way we Muslims feel apologetic for everything that we are accused of, why are we so much ready to show a defeated mentality?

Have we seen the Christians apologising for raging wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Have we seen the Jews apologising for the atrocities committed in Palestine? Have we seen the Indians apologising for the genocide in Gujarat? Have we seen the Buddhists apologising for killing innocent Muslims in a mosque in Thailand?

The reality in today's world is that we see Muslims killed and oppressed and violated over and over again in the name of the global war on terror. Never had the Muslims been so weak as they are today. Never had the Muslims been so vulnerable as they are today.

Mahmudul Hasan, DU

Cosmetic global economy

The commentary "Global Economic Conundrum" (DS Oct 8) provided the lay readers with a peep show on how the US dollar is artfully and artificially maintaining its hold as the number one global currency; and, how the economy inside the rich United States is being maintained using cosmetic policies, precariously balanced on short and/or long-term basis. How long the balancing waltz can last?

The indirect complementary role of China was also analysed at the global level; and the fast growth rate inside China (around 10 per cent per annum) raised some misgiving amongst analysts about its continued stability in the immediate near future. The writer expected that something had to give, to expose the false prosperity now enjoyed by the USD, as the artificial and virtual reality is in unstable equilibrium.

Once the US economy and/or the dollar slides (it escaped in 1989-90 or thereabout), that might be the end of the West, that is, the affluence, power, and hold of the industrialised 'first' world over the third world of DCs and LDCs. Neither the EU nor

Japan can come to the rescue, as both are now in the slow lane, after exploiting the economic dominoes for over a century. The economic failure of 'liberated' Russia is a counterpoise to the rapid march of mighty China on the world scene. The US is now facing several maladies: China, Russia, terrorism, and the future of the global dollar, (not to speak of grabbing the energy reserves all over the world).

Now oil prices have ranged beyond \$50, and the economics of exit from Iraq has to be recalculated. New demographic studies have become sensitive in the industrialised, materialistic world, with waning population growth rates, smaller families, and high cost of living (importing cheaper goods and services from the third world). The new problems of the rich are multi-layered and diversified, twinkling like dying stars from one issue to another.

The world is waiting to see whether the coming November presidential election in the US is going to be a turning point.

Md Abad
Dhaka

Two leaders

Great deluge

Following the country's worst flood there was incessant rain recently in the capital city of Dhaka. All roads & highways, streets, lanes and by-lanes of the city were inundated, submerged and stagnated with dirty water, sewage and human excreta. What a horrible situation! Dhaka looked like a huge sunken ship with hundreds of stranded passengers without any life boat, life jacket, worried and panicked without food and drinking water.

This was not a natural disaster but a man made calamity. Who was responsible for the deluge?

Should the Awami League and the BNP, as per their common strategy, tradition and political culture, blame each other for our untold sufferings?

This is not an incident or a matter of a day or two. We are all--the city dwellers, district administration, DCC, DIT, Rajuk, WASA, successive governments, AL, BNP, JP and various political parties, NGOs, house building companies, government and private estate offices -- equally responsible for the short-sightedness, inefficiency, poor planning, negligence of duty, irregularities, corruption and what not?

What is next? Should we go on sleeping like Rip Van Winkle and suffer from one disaster after another, or wake up? Accusation and counter-accusation would never help us. United we stand, divided we fall. It is not time for contemplation but time for action on emergency basis before the next monsoon arrives.

OH Kabir, Dhaka

the expectation in Europe is that GM food products will increasingly appear on the shelves in the coming months.

Professor V. Moses
Chairman, CropGen panel, London

Don't be misled

This is in response to the letter under the caption "Misinterpretations" written by Ms Ayesha Hossain Shanila (DS 11 October, 2004). The "Message of Islam" is methodology for establishing Peace and Harmony in this World, and ultimately attaining Heaven instead of Hell in the Hereafter. Bangladesh undergoes natural and man-made calamities from time to time, and so do Pakistan and Malaysia. In 1945, there was continuous rainfall for several days in Makkah al Mukarramah and the floodwater rose up to the doors of the Holy Ka'aba! Islam teaches us the magnanimity of the Creator and sublimity of his creations. Outside this relationship manifests a variety of disorders, which we often refer as deceptions of the enemy of mankind, the Satan.

As always, the Almighty is most gracious and most merciful to mankind.

Golam Ashraf
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka

Three distinct trends

As a reader I am reacting to the article 'A liberal Muslim goes to America' (DS Oct 6). Existing civilisation (s) today are ripped with three social phenomena: aggressive Islamists; Islamophobia; followed by (what I term as) 'Yankeeophobia'. Psychological fear in millions has created new terror camps. The classical quote "The East is East, and the West is West, and never the twain shall meet" looks prophetic today.

Now, considering the bruised image of Islam in the eyes of the Western non-Muslims, it appears that the minority extremists have infected the image of Islam. The latter have had several centuries' experience of ruling large parts of the globe in several continents, and these histories are well documented for study by scholars and the general citizens of the world.

Islam had declined since and so did the industrialised West, just passing the wobbling peak. Today it is an open battle for the survival of the fittest (the Muslims on one side, and the combined Christians and Jews on the other).

One side's DNA memory-bank is enriched due to past experience. One is at peak (with declining curve), and the other is trying to ascend from the lowest point. It is known as the rise and fall and shift of history and/or civilisations. One aspect looks ominous: this new millennium has switched on the beginning of the change of

civilisation(s). It is not a new phenomenon; the cycles of history have recorded these change-over points.

The critical potential asset (according to the materialists) is the control of the natural energy resources and sites located in different parts of the world. Many of these natural reserves are in Muslim-majority countries (ME, CIS, gassy Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Saudi and N African deserts, etc). The game plan is an open-secret.

The other trend is economic: the out-sourcing of services from the first world to the third world countries: to the DCs. Note the booming IT and computer centres in India (high-level English-knowing workers), the RMG industries, and the shifting of low-tech consumer goods factories. There is an off-the-screen war between US and EU on capturing future markets in the third world (70 per cent of future markets). The huge China's cheap goods are very disturbing to Western industrialists; as Western goods and services cost several times more, due to high standard of living (high wages-the cost of doing business in the first world has gone up, with declining markets and cheaper competitors).

Islamophobia is the second priority; the first is the constant fear of declining standard of living in the West. EU is limping economically. After the US: who would be "Uncle Sam"? None: That is the fear of lack of leadership and control.

The philosophy looks simple: The right to fight a war against personal and group economic insecurity. Who likes to be poor voluntarily, and lead a simple life?

A Husnain, Dhaka

Boring politics

Why political news, whether at home or at the international level, has become so widespread, monotonous and boring (asks a citizen riddled with problems in daily life which are suspected to have political origins). Whether in the electronic or print media, the time and spaces are preoccupied with the caprices of the political pundits who pose as experts in the art (not science) of creating chaos out of order. There is something wrong with the entropy of politics (it has to do with the misuse of energy).

In Dhaka, the two major political parties turn milk sour (phata-phati with the milk of human kindness!); while at the global level, we are regaled with the unchanging patterns of violence in Palestine and Iraq.

It is because political cultures are not obeying the standard boundary conditions. "Standard" in politics? If so, what the UN system is doing to bring some sanity in the game? The hidden culprit is the nibbling-effect

of the outdated veto cultured inside the UN Security Council. The survival effect of bad politics is getting stronger (Megawati has accepted the verdict of the election, but won't say she lost as heard on the TV). Nations are suffering from unstable equilibrium. The reset time period is getting longer; and the non-essential debates continue.

What has happened to statesmanship in politics? Like the eternal feminine mystique, now we have the political mystique. The latter is so crude, exposed, naked and unashamed, while the other looks natural and

However, such festivity soon disappeared when military, paramilitary, police and the like swarmed in almost every polling booth turning those into semi-battlefields. Muscle flexing of leading parties is common phenomenon during elections, resulting in countless untoward incidents. Contemplating the fact that "Democracy matures with time", I have experienced a different election overseas that left me with a few points to ponder. October 9th, 2004 was the Australian Federal Election Day. John Howard, the ruling prime minister from the

rate of abortion among girls between 15 and 49 is 28/1000. The rape rate is also very high. And there were 410 incidents of acid-throwing in 2003.

Now let's have a look at the western countries, which are taken as a model of women's freedom. The porno industry generates 7 billion dollar every year in the capitalist world, a figure greater than the turnover of the so-called "legitimate film and music industries" combined together. In the US, porno films account for a million dollar business every day and in Britain 20

Keith Miller



It was indeed sad to hear about the demise of Keith Miller, a cricket legend.

Tall, handsome and well-built, Miller was likened to a Hollywood macho-star. He visited undivided India playing for the Australian Services Team in the year 1945 under the captaincy of Lindsay Hassett, who served as vice-captain when the great Don Bradman was Australia's Test captain.

Miller scored a blistering 82 against India at Calcutta's famous Eden Gardens which included four sixes of four successive deliveries of V. Mankad, one of India's greatest all-rounders. He delighted the crowd with both his aggressive batting as well as bowling.

Miller along with Ray Lindwall formed the deadliest opening bowling combination in the late forties up to the mid-fifties. They wreaked havoc with the opposing teams. Lindwall use to bowl at over 90 miles per hour and was well supported by Miller at the other end.

Robert Kader, Chittagong

suggestive. But the game in Dhaka is paradoxical. What else to say?

AZ, Dhaka

Elections in Australia

I have witnessed a few parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. Every Election Day was festive. Prior to casting vote, a feeling of 'change' prevailed in our minds obsessed with the dreams and aspirations of a new day.

Liberal Party, and Mark Latham, the Labour leader, were the contenders. This election is important in the global context, considering Australia's position on Iraq War and fight against terror, but then 'election modalities' were conducive and peaceful.

Despite Australia's delicate position as a major US ally, people were more focused on domestic issues and visions of the contenders to uplift their living standard than crucifying the 'leaders'. I was surprised to find no members from law enforcing agencies in and around the polling booths; party representatives welcomed everyone with a smiling face while mobile food services continued serving ready-made dishes. I can feel the difference of culture, education and attitude that leads to a successful election. There is no bad feeling, for, our country is still an infant in respect of materialising 'democracy and its institutional practices'. Democratic governments are functioning since early 90's and we also experienced few changes. I believe many would contemplate that our people are more conscious and upright than they were in the past. Those are certainly positive indicators. There is a lot to be done, a hard job indeed. And it is always easier said than done.

Mahub
Melbourne, Australia

Liberation of women

In Bangladesh, prostitution has been legalised and it is said that the

million copies of porno magazines are sold every year, producing a revenue of 500 million dollars.

Is this what women seek from their freedom?

Sharifuzzaman Sohel
Dept. of Political Science, DU

Stranded Pakistanis

Whatever the political or social background may be, the issue of stranded Pakistanis (Bihari) in Bangladesh should be resolved forthwith. These people are now living in sub-human condition in various repatriation camps popularly known as Geneva Camp. Ironically, Geneva (perhaps UNHCR or ICRC) has no headache for these suffering human beings! Many of them have died with their unfulfilled dream of going to Pakistan, a country they considered as their homeland. But as ill luck would have it, Pakistan is virtually reluctant to accept these people.

It may be indicated here that the so-called Geneva camps are contributing to the generation of various problems ranging from humanitarian to felony.

In my opinion, the government of Bangladesh should offer temporary citizenship to these people and rehabilitate them in different parts of the country. Permanent citizenship may be granted to them on completion of certain provisional period.

Professor M. Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Language
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural
University, Dhaka-1207



PHOTO: STAR