

CEC's confusing initiative

All the makings of an avoidable blunder

THE Election Commission's dramatic move to invite 111 (as of yesterday) political parties to a dialogue on voter-list may be well intended but is clearly ill-conceived and failure-prone.

There is no question though that an exhaustive, accurate and authentic electoral roll is central to the very exercise of the right to adult franchise and the fundamental basis for the conduct of fair and credible elections in the country. So, the concern of the election commission over perfecting the existing voter list which is flawed in no small measure, aside from the new generation of voters waiting to be franchised, is well understood and deserves to be universally shared.

But while the EC's goal is welcome, it's the method it has embarked on to accomplish the task that we find ill-judged and questionable. For, of the 111 political parties being approached, as many as 41 did not field any candidate in the last election, 33 fielded only one, 10 had two candidates and five three candidates each. By inviting them all, the EC is not only giving legitimacy to the whole lot of nondescript political non-entities but also according them equal status with the top order political parties with proven political and electoral weightages in and out of parliament.

The first day of the planned 3-day dialogue will be devoted to 69 political parties. The major political parties will not even get the time to settle on to their seats.

The best way to go about it for the EC would have been to mainstream the discussion with the political parties represented in the parliament and then, if need be, associate the other political parties, albeit with names, addresses and party offices which seem to be currently missing, according to some EC sources.

The way things are, however, the signboard-only political parties will be only coveting the photo-opportunity to publicise themselves, so their participation is guaranteed. But unless the major political parties see reason to participate in what is bound to be an unwieldy and unfocussed discussion it will be an exercise in futility.

It seems allocation of election symbols over the years was set as the criterion for selecting political parties for the talks, which is why it is such a loosely formulated and operationally unrealistic approach. Yes, this could imply that the CEC wanted to be inclusionary with his juristic experience perhaps prompting him to appear as 'even handed'. It could as well be a calculated risk on his part to engage political parties somehow on some scale. But he has come from a specialised, somewhat coralled and cocooned legalistic pedestal which is a world apart from the complexities of the political and electoral paradigms. He heads an institution that conducts election which is at the heart of a political process, so that he has to be cognisant of the sensitivities of the political realities to be effective in his designated role.

As far as the political parties go, being participants in the elections, they have a clear stake in an authentic electoral roll. But the thing is political parties do not prepare the voter list, it is the sole responsibility of the EC to do so. The reason why political parties need to be consulted though is to seek their opinion on how best an electoral roll can be authentic, and where they can fill in the gaps by having their constituencies fully represented on the voter list. Hence, the need for the EC to engage the political parties in a dialogue and the corresponding necessity for the political parties to cooperate with the EC over the question of preparing an authentic voter list.

Cops as robber?

Internal cleanup warranted

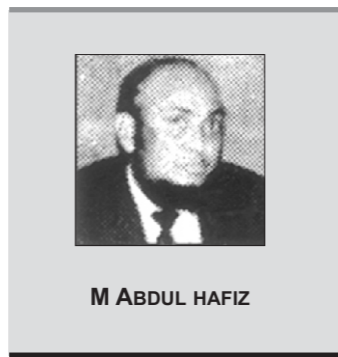
THE recent arrest of four policemen including an assistant sub-inspector with charges of extortion and snatching ornaments from employees of a jewellery house has sent shock waves across the society. At least four other cases of police criminality and subsequent arrests had been reported earlier this year.

What is to be noted is that only after the victims had reported them were they proceeded against. There is no internal mechanism either to detect any police offence or to prevent any such offence taking place. The authorities like to play down the incidents by claiming them as isolated, but the fact remains that the wrongdoing of the wayward tainted the entire police force's image. We think that the majority in the police force are professional, but it is also true that the criminal trend is increasing within.

Therefore we urge the authorities to clean up the house first. An internal corrective process must be initiated as soon as possible; because unless the criminal elements are weeded out from within, similar offences by some members of the force are very much likely to be committed.

There is a general impression that the cases against policemen die a natural death for various reasons: one is that since there are only departmental proceedings, the chances of severe punishment to the offenders are minimal; and secondly, it's very rare that one gets to hear about the final outcome of the cases. The public have a right to know what happened to the previous cases.

Stalled peace process between India and Pakistan



M ABDUL HAFIZ

NOTWITHSTANDING far too many disappointments to permit anything other than a cynical view of the peace process now underway between the subcontinent's two arch rivals, the joint statement issued in New Delhi last month on the conclusion of President Musharraf's cricket diplomacy promoted a measure of optimism not only about the success of composite dialogue but also for the prospects for an early resolution of such disputes as Siachen glacier or Sir Creek issue leading ultimately to the resolution even of a tricky Kashmir dispute in the light of freshly defined parameters. At least the spirits prevailing on either side reflected that. Echoing the buoyant mood of the peaceniks when President Musharraf called the current peace process 'irreversible' it carried with it a degree of conviction that had never been there in any earlier exchange of this nature.

It was obviously expected that while the core issue of Indo-Pak

i.e. Kashmir dispute is so frankly discussed among the leaders of both the countries, other relatively minor issues would easily be resolved paving the way towards a meaningful dialogue on Kashmir. Sadly, however, the recent inconclusive negotiation on Siachen and Sir Creek suggest that the optimism generated in the wake of intensive Musharraf-Manmohan parleys was indeed premature. It is

ters of India and Pakistan, Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto, arrived at an informal agreement in 1989 "to eliminate the wasteful expenditure incurred by both sides on maintaining troops in a region where more soldiers died of exposure to the cold than killed in military action." Yet, the parties concerned continued to stick to their entrenched position showing no sign of flexibility. The same fate awaited the Tuesday talks on

over two years just to understand each other's point of view on a relatively less complicated issue! It is also dampening to hope to resolve far more complicated and sensitive issues than Siachen or Sir Creek.

Ignoring the fact that there has been no satisfactory progress on any bilateral issue discussed under the composite-dialogue, Prime Minister Singh, however, insisted on 29

fatigue in the ritualistic motion of the peace process and the warmth generated by Musharraf's Delhi visit to witness one day cricket match seems to be on the wane. A cease-fire along the line of control that was in place for last one-and-half years and faithfully observed seems to be coming to an end. The muted allegations of gross LoC infiltration are again becoming audible. The pro-peace soli-

ment on any substantial issue extremely difficult.

Mr Advani recently on a visit to Pakistan agreed with President Musharraf that the peace process had now been taken over by the people of two countries. Indeed, there is an increasing realisation on both sides of the border that a protracted confrontation has taken too heavy a toll on two generations of their people and that it is now time to bury the hatchet and concentrate on development efforts aimed at bringing about people's wellbeing. The peace process however goes on a razor's edge and even an unintentioned mistake can derail its course. In the past such processes were scuttled even when they were rearing fruition and things were absolutely positive.

It will therefore be a grave mistake to underestimate the threats to the peace process from powerful elements in both the countries who are bitterly opposed to any resolution of disputes between India and Pakistan. Their design can only be defeated if the composite dialogue now underway shows concrete result and succeeds in resolving, or at least in making progress on the less complicated issues like Siachen or Sir Creek as quickly as possible. That will not be possible unless both the countries start trusting each other and making sure that they do not abuse each other's trust.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

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rudely realised that the exercise were just deja-vu and hardly anything new in direction. The inconclusive talks were just rituals and do not promise even of their resumption any time soon.

Even if both Musharraf and Manmohan committed in their joint-statement to expedite Siachen demilitarisation process both India and Pakistan once again failed to make any headway at the Defence Secretary peace process 'irreversible' it carried with it a degree of conviction that had never been there in any earlier exchange of this nature.

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Sir Creek as both sides failed to iron out their differences. It was the eighth round talks on Sir Creek and the second one under the current round of the composite dialogue. During those meetings a thorough study of the issue including a joint survey of the Creek had already been done.

The statement issued after first day's talk on Sir Creek told that each other's point of view had now been understood. It was ridiculous indeed! Because that would mean that the negotiating teams of India and Pakistan comprising very experienced officials took eight lengthy sessions stretching

May last "We are moving in right direction and hope to solve the problems amicably." The Indian Prime Minister went in to emphasize that his country was committed to making "full and sincere efforts to resolve all bilateral problems with Pakistan through talks in spite of certain difficulties in the path." Notwithstanding such lofty pronouncement emanating from Delhi an element of distrust somewhere in some quarter continues to stall the talks. In this manner the dialogue may be dragging on in its own momentum but without a purpose.

Already there are signs of

parity in both the countries is also eroding and the road blocs to peace are piling up.

Under the circumstances, if the real process on any of the substantial issues continues to elude the interlocutors the policy makers in both India and Pakistan ought to have a hard look at the structure of the composite dialogue, and should take a stock of what all has it achieved so far and rethink the *modus operandi* all over again. The insightful analysts are convinced that the way the composite dialogue is structured confers an inherent rigidity on the bilateral talks which makes any significant progress or even a forward move-

Whither our sense of responsibility?

ABDUL KHALEQUE

WE did not agitate and politically demand electricity during the British rule. Even in the early 1950s of the last century, punkha pullers had been at work in major offices, elitist government and private residences in which, these days, we see in use multi-patterned expensive electric fans, lights, televisions, various gadgets and air conditioners which consume electricity. Although we produce a meagre quantum of electricity, we see around electric lights of high voltage and variety in the premises of elitist residences and important public and private houses which are generally extravagantly illuminated on social and national occasions. Big hotels, restaurants, clubs, institutes, bhabans, community centres etc. where miscellaneous socio-economic and political functions including birthdays and anniversaries and social gatherings are held, use decorative electric lights heavily.

Recently, Dhaka Municipal Corporation undertook a project of illuminating a lot of trees on either side of special roads in some sections of the Metropolis as a part of its city beautification programme. The illumination of trees, hotels, restaurants, shops and malls, amongst others, in a condition of painful load-shedding which disrupts life, production, education, business etc. almost everyday in the metropolis, is utterly unjustified in the context of the acute inadequacy in the essential production scale of electricity. To crown all counts of the malaise in respect of the use of electricity, road lights at places are generally switched on about one hour before sunset, and switched off about one hour after sunrise to

the surprise of metropolitan citizens who go out for morning and afternoon walks. Others perhaps take no notice of this misuse. Once switched on, fans and lights are not switched off in most government and some other offices when cool air and brightness are not at all necessary or when these offices are closed for the day.

The extravagance in the use of electricity in the metropolis in the context of inadequacy of its production and supply is certainly painful to all other than the users. The illumination of roadside trees brings to public view clearly the negligence meted out to these

direction and lay its icy hand on culprits. The manipulations in electricity bills prepared by DESA officials are very well-known woes. The high executives of DESA are utterly helpless against the very strong combines of their field staff who have been desperately making money over years illegally. As we hear, the benign rural electrification programme supported by outside and has also been suffering from the melodies referred to hereinabove. The benefits are largely overshadowed by pains.

Big consumers of electricity including government and semi-government organisations do not

default of delay in payment.

We head of big defaults in the payment of bills on government telephone used in the Parliament hosted by outsiders who stayed over there in the absence of MP's and also of outstanding bills of some government and semi-government offices. It is presumed, the arrear bills have been paid by now, or written off by competent authority. Years ago, we heard of defaulters in payment of electricity bills and rents of abandoned buildings used by some political parties. The Finance Minister would be happy to know if such were cleared up by now.

dence above Secretaries to the Government.

Eminent lawyers, doctors, engineers, educationists, agro-specialists, scientists, top technocrats and such other persons are conspicuously absent in our parliament, because they are unable to enter the poll-market. For such persons second chamber of parliamentary scheme can certainly raise the quality of the parliament and ensure learned debate on modern socio-economic subjects related to development and governance.

In international exhibitions of development outfits, our dele-

clause, as it is learnt from newspapers, for negligence and inefficient handling of gas extraction operation at Tenggratia, was couched in terms fully unfavourable to Bangladesh, as a result of which the Corporation decided unilaterally to allow gas-flow-outs till the leakage would automatically stop, in the meantime continuing the havoc in the life of the people around and causing total exhaustion of the gas stock in the field.

Usually an undeveloped country is given a technology whose life span is almost exhausted or which is far below the acceptable standard. We experienced this disaster in our purchase of air and river crafts from advanced countries. Critics raise the suspicion of palm greasing in such deals.

Apart from the misuse of gas at times, corruption associated with respect to the false reporting about the ovens used by domestic consumers and the absence of meter to determine the quantum used for price fixation, we hardly think about the unlucky 90 percent of our people who have not yet got gas connection. We frequently talk about the export of gas on the basis of estimates prepared by interested parties or their local and non-local allies. From the national point of view, we cannot deprive the vast majority of our people of their right over the country's natural resource. It is heard that the big defaulters of gas bills are coming up with demand for writing off their long pending bills in the same proportion as has been decided in the case of electricity bill defaulters!

Abdul Khaleque is a former IG, Police and secretary.

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trees by officials concerned in taking care of the trees after their plantation. The illuminated trees are seen in a state of painfully disorderly and zig-zag posture. Lack of care of trees planted is spectacular across the country. Post-plantation lack of care may be seen from cars and buses throughout the metropolis and countryside. The plantation season is still on. The Ministry of Forest can direct plantation at the vacancies caused by negligence of officers and other reasons.

Bangladesh is reportedly full of electricity thieves. Some business houses, mills, factories, shops and even private consumers have been, as the newspapers occasionally discover, involved in the commission of the heinous crime in collusion with corrupt personnel of concerned authority. In the name of system-logs, the scale of corruption in DESA operations is really horrendous. The Anti-Corruption Commission may cast its eyes in this

pay regularly monthly bills, because the prescribed action is not taken for their defaults. This situation has created a default amounting to a disgraceful quantum of arrears. The authorities concerned are soft with these defaulters and harsh with those who pay bills sometimes with negligible delay without any bad intention.

It is reported that there is cabinet decision to write off Tk 500 crore of defaulters' bills, in the forlorn hope that such a step will stimulate the endeavour of defaulters to clear up outstanding bills. The moment the decision will start to be implemented the cat will come out of the bag to speculate the special circumstance which prompted such a decision in favour of lucky defaulters, to the discrimination against other consumers of electricity who usually pay fine for default in payment of monthly bills, and sometimes lose connection of electricity for small

Bank loan defaulters are numerous and many of them are otherwise important and respectable persons. Some of them on the upside of the list have been given national VIP status. Most of such loan defaulting VIPs are owners of a huge lot of property and leaders in business and industry, and are vying with each other in mercantile growth and luxury of life. Quite a few of them own banks and insurance companies, and make heavy investments in major political parties in order to obtain deferred dividends. The Bankruptcy Law exists in name only. The increasing growth of mercantilism, civil and military bureaucracy in the politics of the country has enfeebled democratic and humanistic culture in the broad facade of life and attitude. It came out in newspapers that big tax-payers would also be raised to VIP status very soon. The Dhaka University Senate resolved to demand for professors warrant of prece-

gates generally figure out as loitering sight-seers. The Chinese send out a huge lot of technical and scientific experts from amongst its eight ministries of industry and university arenas, who constantly take note in exhibits and gadgets and arrange to purchase necessary equipment they select, at very low price when the exhibition starts winding up. This strategy has enabled China to present a rapid and high development profile in the world.

The profile of our negotiations with foreign donors, UNO agencies, foreign governments and multi-national corporations in matters related to aid, loan, technology transfer's and joint ventures does not show the required standard of quality. This inadequacy is spectacular in respect of international agreements, which follow such negotiations. In the agreement on gas extraction with the NIKO Resources Limited of Canada, the compensation

OPINION

'London bombings, violence and Islam'

M K BARUA

MR Asghar Ali Engineer's article London bombings, violence and Islam (DS -21.07.05) is very shocking. His credential as chief of Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, does not accord with his views. Justifying London bombing overtly and covertly. Though he said, "Why do they resort to such operations in which, more often than not, they lose their lives in the prime of their youth? Is it because of their religious fanaticism? Can such operations be explained as mere acts of religious fanaticism? I think not. No psychologist will agree with such oversimplified explanation."

So, what has inspired the London bombers who are British citizen of Pakistani origin, to inflict heavy casualties upon

their co-citizens for their Govt's misdeed in Iraq and Afghanistan? How they are concerned? Is it sheer humanitarianism? Or the sorrow for their Muslim brothers of Iraq and Afghanistan? (but again, are not some Iraqis and Afghans supporting UK and USA?) It is indeed for their Muslim brothers, for the glory of Islam and Ummah. If they are not brainwashed to fight with the enemies of Islam and promised heavenly pleasure by the religious bigots (it is revealed that they had stayed in a Madrasa in Pakistan for nearly 3 months before they executed the plan which by any means cannot be called bravery but a nefarious act of cowardice), they would demonstrate peacefully, voice their opinion for the unjust engagement of their government in Iraq and else-

where. If they (the misguided Islamists) have guts why do not they attack Tony Blair or George Bush, why they plant bomb in buses or in trains? Is it anger or hate? Taliban had destroyed more than 2000 year old world's tallest Buddha statue of Bamiyan. What was it? Anger, hatred or fanaticism? Again, Mr. Engineer advocated "In our globalised world all countries are multi-religious and multi-cultural. If few members of one community use violence against another community it can inflame situation and destroy the very spirit of multiculturalism. This is precisely what has happened in U.K. and earlier in the US when on 9/11 New York towers were attacked. Thus it is very important for protecting multiculturalism to

maintain inter-religious and inter-cultural peace." Very true. The world should be multipolar, multicultural, and multi-religious. Why do then the Muslim leaders across the globe talk about Muslim solidarity, Islamic world, Islamic solidarity, 57 countries' OIC? Is it not unilateralism? Only Muslim cooperation or prosperity? In a televised address on 21st July President Musharraf had condemned London terrorist attack. He said it is giving bad name to Pakistan and Islam. Lot of other things he has said including sincere concern for the downward trend of Muslims world over. He strongly advocated grater co-operation of OIC, re-organising of OIC. But did not say that Muslims should co-operate with peoples of other faiths. This sense of

belonging with other community irrespective of cast and creed, nation and language, shall definitely improve the position of Muslims where they are in minority and reduce the tension, bitterness to a great extent. Today the fantasy of imaginary Islamic solidarity and Islamic unity is poisoning the young minds. In the name of Islam they are doing all sorts of heinous acts. (Killing of more than 200 school children in Boslam, 9/11, Madrid train blast, bombing in Bali and 7/7.) Then Mr. Engineer wrote, "These youths acting as suicide bombers or planting car bombs etc. are not so much fanatics as angry young men boiling with anger at these western countries destroying their countries and killing and raining death and destruction." In UK we see today

that how British people are expressing their anger at Muslims of UK, by attacking their mosques because some suspected Muslims planted bombs in central London which resulted in loss of 55 innocent lives. Do we call them 'fanatics'? No. They are simply expressing their anger at loss of innocent lives. Just imagine how angry would they have been if UK had been attacked by Iraq or any other Muslim country and it had rained death and destruction on innocent civilians in addition to military targets." Again Mr. Engineer has failed to understand that, the 7/7 bombers are not Iraqis, they are British citizen of Pakistani origin. If the bombers were of Iraq, then we could understand it. It is not anger, but fanaticism, which has been overwhelmingly induced in

the young minds by constantly talking about Muslim, Islam, and Ummah. I then ask Mr. Engineer, what should he call the massacre of innocent Gujarati Muslims by the Hindu goons? Is it the expression of anger by the Gujarati Hindus for the Godhra train burning? Or is it a Hindu fanaticism conspired by the Sangh Parivar, VHP and Bajrang Dal? Time has come that we should accept the reality. Today's Islam has been hijacked by the Al-Qaeda, Taliban brand of Islam. It is time for Muslim leaders to oppose this brand of Islam jointly and aggressively and declare that, whatever the cause, violence against innocent unsuspecting people should be stopped. As M. Engineer has rightly said, "Everyone knows that hatred begets hatred and violence begets violence."

But what he failed to mention is what Buddha had said more than 2500 years ago, "Win hatred by friendship, violence by compassion." Lastly, I fully agree with Mr. Engineer, that, there is a need for a reformer in Muslim societies, true preacher of religion, a religion which does not discriminate against people, a religion which forbids violence in any form, a religion which should not propagate human beings as Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist but human beings as from a single fraternity.

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