

## Wake-up call for France Immigrants' rights must be addressed

THE two weeks of continuous riots in more than 300 localities across the length and breadth of France has reached such a state that President Jacques Chirac has been forced to declare a state of emergency, effective from midnight last Tuesday.

The riots have come as a shock, not only to the French, but to all of us around the world who had thought of France as a model of liberalism and moderation. The present crisis should be taken as an indication that even in societies that appear functional and prosperous on the surface there are many resentments and dysfunctions hidden beneath.

The riots must serve as a wake-up call for France. They have revealed the country's sordid under-belly of unemployment and alienation, specially among the mainly Muslim immigrant population from North Africa. Indeed, the riots bring into sharp focus the two main problems that the country faces at present -- the society's inability to assimilate its large immigrant population adequately, and the economy's inability to create sufficient employment opportunities.

The disenchantment of the immigrant population who are discriminated against and marginalised, and face harassment from the authorities, is an issue that the French must deal with seriously. By not integrating the second generation of immigrants from North Africa into the society, the French are sitting on a ticking time bomb, and although simple solutions to this complex problem are not easy to come by, it is clear that the issue cannot be solved by the approach taken so far.

No less troublesome is France's economic model which has failed to create jobs even as it protects existing ones. The victims of France's stringent labour policies are the young under-class who find it virtually impossible to find a job. France must give serious thought to reforming its economic model to make it not only competitive in today's world, but also generating sufficient new jobs for the rising number of educated unemployed. The riots make clear that young people would prefer jobs to government hand-outs.

However, while we are sympathetic to the plight of France's immigrant community, it should be understood that none of these grievances justifies the destruction and rioting of the past two weeks. The rule of law must be upheld, and we cannot accept the widespread burning of cars or violent attacks on the authorities that have marked the last fortnight.

The first order of the day in France is to restore order, but this can only be accomplished if the legitimate grievances of the rioters are listened to.

## St. Martin's Island

No jetty at the tourist spot!

AT least 1,500 tourists were stuck at Teknaf on Tuesday as the local administration stopped travelling to St. Martin's Island by sea-truck as there is no jetty there for the vessels.

The tourists, who began to show signs of being agitated, were finally ferried to the island under special arrangements, but certain questions regarding the journey to the place arise for obvious reasons. First, the tourists didn't know that they wouldn't be allowed to travel by sea-truck. It has been reported that getting down from the small vessels is hazardous for women and children in the absence of a jetty.

The problem that the tourists faced gives a bleak picture of the facilities being offered to the people intending to visit one of our prime tourist spots. Obviously, the island is a place that many local and foreign tourists are interested in. But how long can they retain it if they cannot travel to the island or have to undertake a perilous journey? There was a jetty at the island last year which has vanished into thin air for the reason not known to us. Again, the task of building a new one didn't receive due attention. The report published in the daily Prothom Alo says that the local Union Parishad did not give the permission for rebuilding the jetty. But it is very unclear why the local body failed to realise the importance of reconstructing the jetty when hundreds of people visit the island every day. So the truth of the matter may lie elsewhere. The government department concerned should find out why the jetty could not be rebuilt.

There is great emphasis these days on developing the tourism industry. But the emphasis is not reflected in the ground reality. In today's competitive world the countries are offering more and more facilities to the travellers. But we are not even providing the bare minimum for the tourists to feel encouraged to visit our sites.

The tourism department has to activate itself and make sure that people don't find themselves in great difficulty while seeking the pleasure of travelling to a beautiful place. It needs to do something more than telling us that Bangladesh has great potential to attract tourists.

# Deliberative democracy versus decisionist democracy

ABDUL QUADER writes from Canberra

DEMOCRACY is basically about taking into account collective views in making decisions by the government or any of its agencies entrusted to carry out the functions of the government. There are two distinct ways in which democracy can work in terms of the processes adopted for decision making by the government -- one is called the *deliberative democracy* and the other the *decisionist democracy*.

A deliberative democracy believes in structured public deliberation involving different shades of opinion in the process of official decision-making. On the other hand, a decisionist democracy prefers strong executive government and often the processes of arbitrary leadership in making public policies. Parliamentary system is ideally more suited to deliberative democracy that involves more community participation in major decision making compared to decisionist democracy.

The merit of a deliberative approach to democratic rule lies in its ability to gather information representing a wide range of views conducive to creating conditions for rational decision making by the government. Any participative decision making is likely to be accepted by those affected by the decision in particular and the wider community in general. Moreover, the decision made is more likely to be the right decision because it is generally based on consideration of all

relevant aspects surrounding the issues that require government policy intervention or action.

While both models of democracy are quite valid, deliberative democracy is considered to be more appropriate for bringing about effective outcomes of public policy and government actions. A deliberative democracy believes in more active role of the citizens. It is not limited to voting, rather it encourages them to be more proactive and take part in developing, implementing, and

implications.

Deliberative democracy is a prerequisite for successful parliamentary system of government. In Bangladesh, people expected the practice of this model following the fall of president Ershad in early 1991 when the country adopted a parliamentary system of government.

However, in practice, Bangladesh has mostly followed a decisionist approach to policy making by the government. In general, there is hardly

expression of individual views and ideas on issues which need to be put for debate and deliberation. Deliberation implies participation and greater responsiveness of people and fosters democratic practices in the truest sense of the term.

Democracy in Bangladesh appears to have been limited to competitive elections of political leadership to gain power to govern the country on behalf of the people. The so-called representative government in Bangladesh has

poor. However, the rich-poor gap is still on the rise in the country making the society more vulnerable to crimes, conflicts and instability.

Decisionist democracy may turn into an authoritarian democracy in which executive power and authority of a person (prime minister) or group of persons (Cabinet) generally becomes very prominent and community involvement is ignored in making official decisions or public policy. Many examples can be cited where

business community, especially those engaged in export-import trade, were particularly unhappy because the two-day holidays would hurt their business interests. The government's only consideration was that the 52 additional weekly holidays would reduce fuel consumption in the transport sector and save energy or power consumption in the country.

The government did not consider some adverse consequences of its decision on weekly holidays. These include underutilisation of productive capacity in the economy and the loss of production that have implications for exports. The closure of offices on Friday and Saturday may have adverse impact on communication of Bangladeshi exporters and importers with the rest of the world. Business associations wanted one-day weekly holiday on Sunday to better align their activities with the rest of the world business community.

The key point I would like to make here is that the lack of deliberative democracy leads to less than satisfactory solution to problems affecting different sections of the citizenry or the public. In fine, a collective decision making process that involves all relevant interest groups in the society should be the norm of public policy formulation in a parliamentary democracy like Bangladesh.

Abdul Quader is a freelance contributor.

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evaluating public policies wherever possible. This includes decision making and program implementation at both macro and micro (or grassroots) level.

Similarly, deliberative democracy encourages the development and strengthening of the institutions of civil society which can play an important role in the process of debate about public policies in a democracy. The deliberative democracy also fosters participation of independent policy research institutions to contribute to public deliberation of issues that affect the public in their day to day life as well as more strategic and significant public issues that have longer-term

any serious and credible debate or deliberation on any issue of national significance on which official decisions are made. The government and for that matter its executive arm usually do not take into account all relevant aspects of an issue that deserves due deliberation for effective policy formulation. In other words, policies and decisions are not made on the basis of full and better information that requires timely and comprehensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders (ie, those having an interest in the matter).

While consensus decision making is not the goal of deliberative democracy, it encourages and promotes the

become ineffective to a large extent in achieving the core objectives of democratic governance, such as fostering constructive political participation of the citizens, promoting political consensus on issues of national significance through dialogue, formulating and implementing policies and programs conducive to a more productive economy and a more cohesive and harmonious society which is free from unnecessary conflicts.

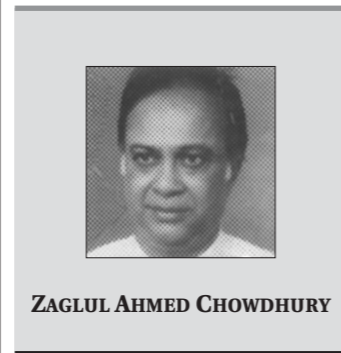
A pertinent aspect of democratic government is the desired goal of allowing all citizens to benefit from nation's economic development and to reduce the social gap and economic disparity between the rich and the

authoritarian approach has been followed by the government in Bangladesh to make policy decisions.

The recent decision of the government to have two-day weekly public holidays on Friday and Saturday is a case in point. The government did not consult with the relevant stakeholders or interested parties or the wider community before declaring Saturday as an additional weekly public holiday in the country. Deliberative democracy would have required wider consultation with different sections of the public before making such an important administrative decision by the government.

Some key stakeholders, such as the

# How feasible is the idea of a SAARC parliament?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

an appropriate time even though it may take quite some time -- may be several years. Some, who see this as a distant possibility, say that this may take even a decade because of the complexities involved in the matter, but what is important is that the ball must be set rolling and a South Asian parliament should become a reality one day.

The idea is being coined largely in line with the European parliament notwithstanding the fact that Europe and South Asia are not similar. On the

can be floated taking into account the distinct features of the region.

They agree that the political maturity of Europe and the broad similarity among countries there on matters of their policies and approaches on global issues helped the European parliament come into being and this in somewhat sharp contrast is lacking in the South Asian region. Nations of this area in many cases do not see eye to eye on the global issues and what is more unfavourable is that rivalry and enmity among some members of the

regional parties like Rastriya Janata Party of Bihar to Telegu Desam of southern Andhra Pradesh and National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir, who have representation in the federal parliament, attended it. Host Pakistan had similar representation including lawmakers from ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) to opposition People's Party and Muslim League (Nawaz). Also were the parliamentarians from the six-party Islamic alliance MNA and the largely Karachi based MQM. From

the creation of an institutional interactive mechanism for parliamentarians of South Asia keeping in mind the concept of a South Asian Parliament (SAP).

A full-fledged SAP may take a decade or two, but it is time for initiative moves in that direction, the parliamentarians agreed. To begin with, the conference proposed creation of an intra-parliamentary union in South Asia. SAARC may agree in principle to create a South Asian Parliament and appoint a group of

identity of the region.

However, the second paper on the matter by Pakistan's noted parliamentarian and thinker Aitzaz Ahsan was not as enthusiastic although he broadly supported the concept of the SAP. A lawyer by profession, the Pakistan People's Party lawmaker sounded caution in forwarding the concept in haste as he felt this requires sufficient ground work and other preparations. He says that nothing born or conceived prematurely can be sustained. "The ground is not ready for the SAP as yet" he says, but endorses it in the long run.

The Conference witnessed lengthy discussions on the issue and members were divided as to whether the process should start immediately or not, but all were unanimous on the need of the SAP. Most of the members were of the opinion in line with Dr S D Muni although they stressed on the caution of Mr Ahsan as well. Indian communist MP Nilotpal Basu was particularly in favour of the position taken by Mr Ahsan while most others favoured immediate initiatives. Finally the conference came out with agreed resolution to ensure greater role of the elected representatives of the people in regional cooperation. The participants overwhelmingly endorsed the view to initiate a process of moving towards the creation of a South Asian Parliament with, of course, caution taking into account the pros and cons of its creation in stages.

In any case, the issue of South Asian parliament is gaining prominence albeit the impression and belief that it is unlikely to emerge soon. But the SAP is now being talked about in responsible and important quarters and as such it can be a reality some day. And this, when occurs, will certainly be a great leap forward for the region, home of more than 1.4 billion people.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Foreign Editor of BSS.

## MATTERS AROUND US

In any case, the issue of South Asian Parliament (SAP) is gaining prominence albeit the impression and belief that it is unlikely to emerge soon. But the SAP is now being talked about in responsible and important quarters and as such it can be a reality some day. And this, when occurs, will certainly be a great leap forward for the region, home of more than 1.4 billion people.

contrary, two are different in many ways, on the top the European political and economic advancement being far ahead of the South Asian and this helped there being a continental parliament there. True, South Asia is not a continent as such, but it is the most populous region of the world having more than one fifth of the mankind.

The region is coming up in discussions at global scale for some time past, particularly with the emergence of the regional forum SAARC twenty years ago. As SAARC is becoming a known forum, albeit some criticisms about its slow progress in achieving the objectives, the concept of the South Asian parliament is also coming increasingly to the fore. Admittedly, only few see this as a viable possibility in the immediate future. However, this view has not deterred the concept being advanced by different quarters associated with the region. The promoters of the concept concede that such a parliament is handicapped on several grounds, but insist that this

region at bilateral level makes the feasibility of the parliament here difficult. Then again the promoters argue that when this has become a reality elsewhere then the South Asian parliament will also be the same belying skepticism that persists in certain quarters. The idea is being followed up by the promoters of the concept and it appears that it is gaining greater acceptance. It is being emphasised that further research and well knit ground work are required with a view to giving the idea a sound shape for eventual setting up of the South Asian parliament.

The high profile conference of the parliamentarians of the South Asian countries in Pakistan dwelt with the matter in great detail when the whole issue came for discussion in varying degrees analysing the pros and cons of the concept from different angles without being unnecessarily euphoric about it.

From India, Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), CPM and CPI to

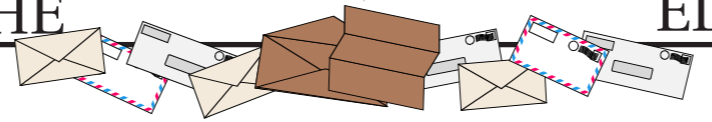
Bangladesh, twelve lawmakers -- five from ruling BNP, four from main opposition Awami League, one each from Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiya Party and one independent member took part in the conference. Same was the case with Sri Lanka but while there is no functioning parliament at present in Nepal, their delegation chose not to attend as one of their colleagues was not allowed to leave the airport. However, media, civil rights activists and others came from Nepal. Needless to say, two other small nations within the SAARC family -- Bhutan and the Maldives -- seem not much in the reckoning as far as the regional parliament is concerned for obvious reasons.

The parliamentarians during the long discussions -- mainly on the basis of two keynote papers presented by two experts -- deliberated on the nitty gritty of the issue and adopted resolution in this regard. The Conference overwhelmingly endorsed the view to initiate a process of moving towards

experts responsible to the SAARC Speakers Forum to prepare a comprehensive report and timeframe to establish it through an evolutionary process.

One of the main papers on the issue was presented by Dr (Professor) SD Muni of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in which he broadly espoused the cause of the South Asian parliament and detailed the concept including how it should be viewed as viable and, more importantly, representative for all the member nations so that none considers it a dominant platform of the big countries, notably India. He made plenty of research on the subject, recollecting how it has come to the fore as well as drawing analogy of course with the European parliament. Dr Muni's conclusive remark is that it is possible and the concept should be pursued from now on. However, he is not euphoric as he is also aware of the problems and obstacles that may stand in the way, but the bottom line is that this should emerge for the larger interest and

# 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.

## Onslaught of nocturnal beings!

In order to restore the original Gulshan South Park, the only park for the dwellers of Gulshan-1 (south), the DCC and RAJUK with the active cooperation of Gulshan Society members have successfully vacated the former Children's Park, popularly known as Shishu Park. The exit of the unauthorised slum occupants was unprecedented, as, for the first time in Dhaka, bulldozers, police force, brawl and hostility were NOT noticed. Everything seemed tranquil till late night. The neighbours were unexpectedly raided by hundreds of 'king size' rodents, muskrats, healthy mole rats, stout weasels, and some plump mongooses. Because they found themselves solitary and helpless; there was none to provide them with minimum subsistence for survival!

Bravo to those who lived with these

concealed creatures so peacefully for almost two decades! Or, is it that the former occupants had trained them to avenge their departure? Whatever the context may be, these rodents go underground at daytime to avoid eviction or extinction by DCC workers and at night become 'active' to replenish themselves for survival. Do they deserve replacement like previous occupiers? Are they conspiring (!) to launch an underground (London like) assault on us?

Animallovers, please think over it.

Tajul Islam  
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

## Hindu marriage law

The Hindu marriage law should be updated. There is no legal evidence of Hindu marriage in Bangladesh. The marriage should be registered for the sake of legal record. Steps in this respect are being taken in India.

I think the Bangladesh government

should also initiate a similar process.

Indrajit Das  
Dhaka

## Biman, epitome of failed public sector

You see Bangladesh Airlines flying planes, but I see those as the begging pans of the panhandlers. Let me explain.

Biman, like many other public sector enterprises in Bangladesh, has forged an unholy nexus with the corrupt political machinery. It managed to acquire those obsolete planes. And once they can paint the national flag on the tails and fronts of those planes, they are above any accountability. They became the big time panhandler wearing fancy fatigues and broken planes, instead of broken pans and untidy clothes of street beggars.

When the airline is losing crores of

people's money without providing an iota of service, its employees are ripping off the outrageous perks and benefits for themselves and their families. How many free trips are they offering to their family members? The New York routine is kept alive just for the pleasure trips for Biman's extended family members, so that they can meet and greet their relatives even though this route never earned a penny for Biman.

We are all concerned about the street crimes of Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh but when would we try to address these types of crimes of the bureaucracy?

By the way, many US airlines are offering pay cuts to their pilots and employees and they are obliging.

Thank heaven that these airlines do not have the advantage of pasting the national flag on their planes.

A. Islam, US

## Project our culture

Unlike some 19-year-old youngsters in Bangladesh, I was not rejoiced to see the announcement of bringing in Indian Idols as part of Eid special programmes in a reputed channel, neither was any Bangladeshi living abroad who watches the channel regularly. On behalf of everyone out here, I want to express my deepest sorrow to see the priorities of the channel. It's a shame that they planned to do this. We miss Bangladesh, we want to see programmes that reflect our country, our culture. Isn't Indian culture prevailing everywhere already?

Quoting some fellow Bangladeshis here, "I'd prefer to watch 10 more Close-up 1 finalists who were eliminated towards the end, rather than watching some junk Hindi stuff. Come on, what are the Indian channels for? They are doing there job

pretty well!" I want to ask the following question to the makers of the show: "Why are you spending so much money to show something that does not reflect us at all?" Let that money stay in our home, invest it to make ourselves larger. Pay that money to 10 more hidden gems in the distant corners of Bangladesh. We earn here and send our money home not to see our culture not getting due coverage in television programmes.

Please promote more contests like Close-up 1. We smiled, rejoiced, gossiped, laughed, and cried watching the show. Believe me, we are impatiently waiting to watch the show with Close-up 1 finalists, not the Indian Idols. They mean little to us. Bangladesh has its own talents and they are so pure at the heart. They touch the soul, make us proud. Our tunes are timeless.

Some of my friends tell me from

Bangladesh how excited they are about the show with Indian Idols. I asked them how many times did they stop and listen to some good old Bangla songs? Quiet they remained. Songs like "Je chhilo dshtrish shimanay.", "Amay gethe dao na mago ekta polash fuler mala...". I won't deny that I listen to Bollywood stuff too but they never touched my soul as the songs I mentioned above did. I'm not asking people to boycott Bollywood or anything like that. Bollywood has reached us so well that even if someone wants to deny it, he cannot. If you have your ears open when you walk down the streets in Bangladesh, you will be in touch with it, no matter what I am trying to say.

My final words: Promote the new generation in Bangladesh. It is in your hand to decide what you will do. Please get into our culture before the virus in it becomes incurable. The real

pride is in accepting all cultures but reflecting our own.

Mourushi Muhoo  
Oklahoma City, US

## Why this delay?

It is learnt from your report that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Defence Ministry is deliberating on the issue of AFD and MoD. The High Office in the Old Gonobhaban seems to suffer from great inertia. Example: While everybody else including the retired employees of the government are drawing their benefits under the new pay scale, the retired armed forces personnel are yet to get their, as a JSI could not yet be issued, even after such a long time.

A sufferer  
One-e-mail