LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 2008

#### Coping with flood conditions

Relief efforts needed on a concerted scale

HE flood situation appears to have taken a bad turn in the central regions of the country, even though some improvement is noticeable in the north. Overall, there is a feeling, based on Met office reading of the situation, that the worst may well be behind us. But this is the time that flood water is flowing down deltaic Bangladesh bringing in its wake all kinds of problems. Indeed, reports coming in from the affected areas speak of submerged localities, marooned people and an outbreak of such diseases as dysentery and diarrhoea with waters receding. Obviously, there is now a need for relief operations to be in place and in full gear.

As one understands, however, the state of relief is none too good; efforts on a bigger scale are needed to meet the multiple challenges. In such a situation, it will not be amiss or unnatural to expect the political parties, with their countrywide network, to come forward in their own way with relief materials for the succour of the distressed. Additionally, there is the question of what the many NGOs, which have always been part of the relief process, can do to alleviate the sufferings of the people. One, of course, understands the peculiarity of a situation where a state of emergency may not exactly allow the parties and the NGOs to work freely. It is here that the government must come forth with reassurances. This is important, for apart from diseases, there is the problem of river erosion that has put whole families in a state of grave difficulty because of the threats posed to their homesteads. At the same time, the prices of essential commodities have been going up in the affected areas, thus creating a dark possibility of pauperisation for those affected.

All of this calls for a concerted, well-devised strategy not only for the present but also by way of post-flood rehabilitation of the hard-hit farmers. We are yet to devise any flood shelter schemes in the way that we have had cyclone shelter schemes. The time is therefore here and now for such schemes to be undertaken. With some housing schemes already on in certain char areas and proving efficacious too, it makes sense for such projects to be replicated in flood-prone areas.

### Literacy's snail's pace worrying

All-out efforts needed to shore up the campaign

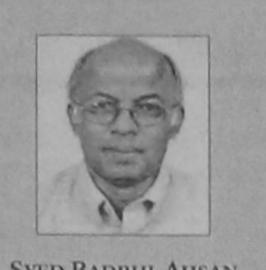
HAT literacy is the prime vehicle for national development in a quintessentially globalised environment is a universally acknowledged fact. Yet, the rate at which literacy has increased in the country since independence when we became the master of our own destiny with the added advantage of pressing the mother tongue into service, leaves a good deal of disappointment to contend with.

On the World Literacy Day, this year's theme being 'Literacy is the best remedy', Chief Adviser of caretaker government Dr Fakruddin Ahmed demurred at the current literacy spread being 63 percent despite the plethora of programmes implemented over the years to raise the figure at par with some of the other Saarc countries. Even this official figure is contested in independent assessments which hold that the spread of literacy in the country, according to international standards, may have actually been less than cited by government circles. Political parties in power have had a way of claiming a high literacy figure to score a political point over each other. So, the level of frustration may be even greater than that ventilated by the chief adviser.

After 24 projects adopted in the name of mass literacy campaign with assistance from development partners and multilateral agencies, NGO-operated adult literacy drives and the government-launched universal and compulsory primary education campaign since the '90s, our hands are full with lessons learnt to be applied in advancing literacy.

First and foremost, the rate of drop-out from primary and secondary level education will have to be markedly reduced. Experts believe the key lies in feeding the children at school with a mid-day meal. Simultaneously, the stipendiary approach needs to be expanded. Secondly, equally important, if not more, is the task of curbing institutional corruption in the primary education and community schooling sectors where ill-paid teachers have to sell their salaries in advance allowing cuts to thugs in order to keep afloat knowing fully well that even the meagre salaries fall in arrears. Last but not least, it is not practicable to nationalise the sector all at once. We have to build up a composite framework for primary education and adult literacy through government, private sector and NGO partnership. But most of all, insofar as achieving universal functional literacy goes, we have no other alternative but to associate the whole community. Since it will take a robust political will to reach a hundred percent literacy, political parties should adopt the target at the top of their list of agenda.

## A brief history of handshakes in our times



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

ILLUR Rahman, the veteran Awami League politician, was spotted shaking hands with the Jamaat-e-Islami's Motiur Rahman Nizami at a Saudi embassy iftar a few days ago. Nothing wrong with that, you just might argue. Shaking hands, after all, is a social thing. If you do not proffer your hands to the individual standing across from you, or before you, you might end up being accused of rudeness or arrogance. That is a point we do not overlook, except that in this instance it was a man whose party has regularly accused that of the other of criminality of the most vicious kind being seen in the company of a man routinely charged with culpability in the genocide perpetrated in 1971. So what do you do now?

You could simply ignore the entire episode as being one more instance of unnecessary and unwelcome conversation. There are more things on heaven and earth, you might pipe up Shakespeare-like, than a matter of a mere handshake in the few minutes that remain before the break of fast. That is the attitude you could, if you wanted, adopt.

#### GROUND REALITIES

Shaking hands is of critical importance. And not shaking them is equally important. On December 16, 1971, for all his initial misgivings, Kader Siddiqui ended up shaking hands with the murderous Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi at the Dhaka race course. It was a place and a time when he could not have done otherwise. It would look bad, less than gracious, had Siddiqui opted to spurn the hand of the defeated soldier.

which will have you come squarely that it will have no dealing with those sins will do all we cannot to up against this age-old problem of another it believes did grievous indulge the sinners in any way. hypocrisy. If the Awami League has wrong to the country in its moment. Which is why none of us will be so emphatically been arguing the of grave peril, it naturally follows did back in 1971 and what should Saudi iftar.

polite note to the embassy regretting the party's inability to be part to Mujib.

that it often cannot ignore the presence or opinions of some influential diplomats from powerful countries. Which means it is not an easy job saying no to an invitation that might come a politician's European or Middle Eastern

And there's the difficulty. Or the dilemma. But consider that other small matter. We call it principle. If

case against the Jamaat and what it that the principle will be lived up to. Ah, yes! There is that bit of hisnow be done about the ageing men tory which comes in as well. who once offered the services of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur the Islami Chhatra Sangha and the Rahman went all the way to al-Badr force to the occupation Rawalpindi, post-Agartala, to talk Pakistan army, it could well have to his tormentor Ayub Khan. They chosen to stay away from that shook hands, didn't they? It has even been said that an increasingly Someone could have sent a politically haemorrhaging Ayub offered the prime ministerial office

been no need for an explanation of Bangabandhu could proffer his March 1971. Sarcasm underlined Ah, easier said than done, you reason can there be for Zillur Tikka's hand, saying, simply, might say. The truth about Rahmantokeephisfromcomingin "Hello, Tikka." There was no Bangladesh's politics in these touch with Nizami's? Point noted. tumultuous, uncertain times, is But note too the fact that prior to that Rawalpindi meeting, Ayub Khan had not committed, or had how men uncomfortable with one not helped to commit, genocide in another have ended up shaking East Pakistan. There was no blood on his hands.

way from the American or any badly wrong when the good seek a November night to make peace compromise with the bad. It may be that the Jamaat is an acknowledged political party, but that does not absolve it of the sins it committed during the War of Liberation. And then there is the other one, a party has adopted the position And those of us who remember Foster Dulles could not and would

willing to shake hands with Radovan Karadzic or Ratko Mladic or the likes of Pol Pot.

But then, Bangabandhu did shake hands with Tikka Khan at Lahore airport in February 1974. Should he have done that? Here, you can be reasonably sure, the Father of the Nation had a strong case going for him. Tikka Khan was the vanquished one who, as chief of Pakistan's army staff, had just saluted the man he had once taken of the program. There would have 
The point here is simple: if prisoner with such contempt in hand to his inveterate enemy, what Bangabandhu's smile as he took respect in that handshake, none whatever in that smile.

There are instances aplenty of hands. Anwar Sadat, the visionary suddenly taking hold of his soul, Obviously, something goes travelled to Jerusalem on a with his Israeli enemies. It was the former terrorist Menachem Begin's hand he took and so set the region down the road to possibilities. It was an attitude that John

not adopt for himself.

At the Geneva conference in 1954, he spotted China's Zhou Enlai approaching him with outstretched hand. He simply turned his back on the Chinese prime minister and walked away. Such appalling behaviour would cost America dear, until Richard Nixon China in 1972 and shake Zhou's handshake cannot easily be hand, the same that Dulles had papered over. rejected with disgust.

Bhutto spewed hate for Indians. He was less than gentlemanly with Sardar Swaran Singh at the United Nations Security Council in 1965; and he had little respect for Indira Gandhi. But then came time for him to eat humble pie. He did that in Simla in 1972, through shaking hands with Mrs. Gandhi.

Shaking hands, then, is of critical importance. And not shaking them is equally important. On December 16, 1971, for all his initial misgivings, Kader Siddiqui ended up shaking hands with the murderous Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi at the Dhaka race course. It was a place and a time when he could not have done otherwise. It would look bad, less than gracious, had Siddiqui opted to spurn the hand of the defeated soldier. You do not humiliate a soldier who has already been defeated in war. You help him keep some of his self-esteem intact.

But what do you do when men like Than Shwe come to you with extended arms? Than Shwe and his men have presided over a constricting dictatorship in Burma for years. Their respect for people outside the confines of their cabal is minimal, or not there at all. Will it then at all be a matter of public discourse if no one shakes hands

with them? Should men of manifest goodwill shake hands with Sudan's Omar el-Bashir after what he has done to the people of Darfur?

Dilip Barua -- he of the Samyabadi Dal -- worries, though He believes that the damage that Bangladesh's secular camp may already have gone through as a decided to travel all the way to consequence of the Zillur-Nizami

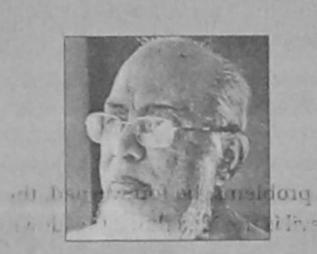
The right wing, and especially All his political life, Zulfikar Ali the men we think are war criminals. will now, in the run-up to the general elections, project that image nationwide as proof of secular hypocrisy.

> And do you realise that Barua may turn out to be right after all? And yet there is the feeling that in time people will get that handshake thing behind them and simply move on. Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury, in his quest for the presidency long years ago, sought the blessings of Golam Azam and was roundly condemned for such behaviour. But

that is now distant memory. In the euphoria of liberation in 1971, Tajuddin Ahmed saw little reason for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to come in with advice or help for Bangladesh. At a meeting in Delhi, he had little wish to shake hands with Robert McNamara. It all changed, however, in 1974. Tajuddin Ahmed, much against his will, summoned up the willingness to call on McNamara in Washington. They shook hands. The world changed for Bangladesh, for better or for worse. Take your

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# Obama's fight for presidency now begins



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

### PERSPECTIVES

Being on the right side of history, Senator Obama accepted his party's nomination for president of the United States amid a volley of cheers and a crowd of 85,000 roaring and stomping their feet in approval as he delivered an apple pie of a speech stuffed with appetising promises of policy changes yet sweetened with his trademark eloquence. The fight for the Democratic candidate to take the White House now begins.

A party nomination, the were relieved by the result it prorecently held Democratic duced. The Democrats remember National Convention at Denver was little more than a formality for Senator Obama to be officially endorsed as nominee and his acceptance, yet its significance didn't end there.

During the year-long campaign, both of the stellar candidates frequently clashed, creating deep schism in the fraternity, which could be, if at all, removed only in a national convention attended by a crowd of party workers, die-hards, and patriarchs.

Cut to the quick by an intraparty feud, and shaken by ragging ratings, the Democratic Party felt presidential candidate to the voters barely 10 weeks before the

won the primaries for the West -- a Republican stronghold -- let them to trump the odds. "I love with a measure of bitterness the state of Colorado, which had seldom been charitable to any Democratic presidential candidate except Harry Truman and Bill Clinton, but returned happy after what they achieved.

> The convention was held in an open-air football stadium attended by an 85,000-strong enthralled crowd and also included celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and rock star Stevie Wonder as well as politicians, party delegates, and ordinary

The prima donna at the concompelled to reintroduce their vention was, of course, Michelle Obama, the 46 year-old spouse of the candidate who in her warm and intimate way communicated At the end, those who felt their very own American story -intrigued at the selection of the ordinariness of their origin

Denver in the Rockies of the Wild and the old-fashioned values that mistaken war." this country," was her pointed

> The emotional pitch went up for the assembled when Ms. Caroline Kennedy, President John F. Kennedy's only surviving child, stepped on the stage. She spoke about how she felt pulled to Obama who, she confessed, inspired her now: "I have never had someone to inspire me the way people tell me my further inspired them."

Another leading light of th Kennedy clan, Senator Edward Kennedy -- despite being treated for a malignant brain tumor -- flew into Denver to be greeted with thunderous applause. His message demolished the perceived leadership deficit in Obama's candidature: "Mr. Obama will be the commander-in-chief who would never send young men to a

Some tough talk also came from the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi: "Republicans say John McCain has experience ... [but] ... McCain has experience of being wrong."

The most magnanimous in the convention had, however, been Senator Hillary Clinton, who declared in no unequivocal terms: "Obama is my candidate."

She affirmed her support for Obama repeatedly, mentioning him by name ten times. Applause rained from the aisles as the began defining herself as a proud Democrat, a proud senator from New York, a proud American, and a proud supporter of Barrack

However, there was one slight issue in the speech. The observers and Republicans were quick to note that her carefully crafted speech did not address the biggest charge that Mrs. Clinton leveled at



Let's start the change.

he ready to lead?

But many think that like Edward Kennedy, Bill Clinton, back in the spotlight in Denver, further elaborated the question by entrusting his presidential legacy to the keeping of Senator Obama in a stellar performance at the Democratic Convention. Bill Clinton's speech at the convention adequately absolved Obama's deficiency, if any, when he likened Obama's presidential bid to his own bid in 1992 when "Republicans said I was too young and inexperienced to be commander-in-chief. It did not work in 1992 because we were on the right side of the history."

"In the end," he said, with a nod to his wife, "My candidate didn't

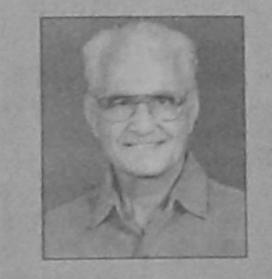
Obama during the primaries -- is win. But I am proud of the campaign she ran."

Being on the right side of history, Senator Obama accepted his party's nomination for president of the United States amid a volley of cheers and a crowd of 85,000 roaring and stomping their feet in approval as he delivered an apple pie of a speech stuffed with appetising promises of policy changes yet sweetened with his trademark eloquence. The fight for the Democratic

candidate to take the White House now begins. It was a historic moment, the 45th anniversary of the "I have a dream" speech by civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King. Is his dream finally coming true?

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

## Pakistan's new politics?



M.B. NAQVI writes from Karachi

AKISTAN has a new president because of the resignation of General Pervez Musharraf on August 18, but the state of the country is a sad one. The economy has been sinking and causing concern all round.

The fiscal deficit left by the Musharraf regime was 7 to 8 per cent of GDP, inflation was between 9 to 10 per cent, while food item inflation was somewhere between 12 to 14 per cent -- now running at 25 per cent over last year. The country's imports this year are expected to be \$40 billion plus while imports are stagnating at around \$19 billion. The pressure on balance of payment can be imagined. Remedial measures are needed on a war basis.

### PLAIN WORDS

Zardari has shown his priorities. He is not bothered about the relations with the US or the various insurgencies that are going on in the country or the economy that is about to become insolvent if it is not bailed out soon. Much of the country remains without power for up to 12 hours a day. His first priority is to fix up his old opening of 1990s. A sorry progress that the country has made.

The country is facing multiple insurgencies by various Islamic extremist groups, most of them calling themselves Taliban, that are linked with al-Qaeda. The Americans and the Nato powers want Pakistan to keep relentless military action inside Pakistan to prevent some of them from crossing into Afghanistan.

The US is now heavily pressurising Pakistan that it should prevent Pakistan becoming a staging post for attacks on Afghanistan no matter what it takes. It is not clear whether Pakistan army is expected to destroy them altogether physically or is it to keep the terrorists militarily engaged for as long as the West is in Afghanistan -- an indefi-

nite engagement with no clear aim. local people.

These extremist groups are ruling most of the tribal areas in the Frontier and the government of Pakistan's writ runs erratically: when soldiers are present Pakistan rules, where they are not present, warlords, criminals and Taliban or other extremists rule.

There is a long list of old persistent problems that require being tackled on war footing. The three smaller provinces complain of Punjab domination that mainly mans the central bureaucracy, military, big business and industry. Smaller provinces demand autonomy with a view to be able to exploit the resources that are there Its two fiery leaders were preaching

The federation is seen being in grave danger because the Baloch nationalist insurgency remains strong enough and Pakistan army has not been able to put it down. Sindh continues to be restive against Punjab and central domination. Frontier has been in the forefront of struggle against Punjab domination.

In his last two years Musharraf took many foolish actions. He dillydallied for nearly six months while the Lal Masjid complex was being used by all manner of Islamic extremists with terror links as staging post for obscure purposes. under the earth for the benefit of the virtues of Taliban Islam and the

need to defeat America. Musharraf negotiated with promises of concessions for six months; then he finally stormed the masjid and two knows how many. Then he tried to sack the chief

justice in March last year. Justice Chaudhry refused to resign and Musharraf and Benazir's PPP to said he would defend himself against the so-called charges Musharraf had shown in an open court. Musharraf was enraged, never having heard a "no" from anyone before. He arrested him there and then in his own office. Before too long the Supreme Court took over the case and within less than four months reinstated him and fined the government Rs.100,000 for submitting scandal-

ous charge sheet before the SC. Meantime a raging movement had grown up. It was to ensure an independent and assertive judiciary to check the executive. Gradually civil society joined it, including many political parties, and media, particularly electronic, and the press gave full support to the lawyers cause. It was openly anti-Musharraf and anti-military domination campaign that is still

What really happened was that

over the unrest, their chief purpose in Pakistan being to ensure its continued role in the War on Terror. attached madressas and killed God US experts recommended giving Musharraf a democratic face. Thus the US and British governments mediated a compromise between

> Pakistan for participating in the November election. Americans and Saudis also ensured that Nawaz Sharif should also be allowed in for keeping up democratic pretensions. Elections had to be delayed because Benazir was assassinated on December 27.

> Unquestionably, Benazir had committed to keep Musharraf as president and to join his War on Terror after hopefully winning the election and forming the government. By the time the government came to be formed in March, the new PPP boss, Asif Ali Zardari, realised that he could not put all his political cards on the table amidst rampant political movements by the lawyers and others for the

He felt compelled to continue with anti-establishment and antidictatorship rhetoric; it wouldn't

the Americans became uncertain do to tie up with Musharraf sup- cases. All the four governments porters. So he conceded Nawaz's were dismissed by presidents who demands and made repeated had no constituency of their own agreements to implement them for but acted on a wink and nod of the PML(N)'s joining his government.

destroyed all High and Supreme the media of those days. Courts on November 3 and forced The deal brought Benazir to out all the judges that were not Corruption cases against Nawaz ready to take another oath of allegiance to his new constitutional revived. The governor of Punjab, a amendments of that day. Some 60 PPP man, is threatening that if the judges were thrown out and new PML(N) insists on throwing out ones appointed. That basically remains the position.

government on May 13 while their coalition in Punjab has all but broken down. Nawaz is demanding that Zardari withdraw his PPP ministers from Punjab government.

The PPP-led government continues to invite Nawaz into the are in place that look like what one had seen during the decade of 1990s when two governments each ity is to fix up his old opening of by Benazir and Nawaz Sharif were formed in Islamabad.

Each tried to harass and corner the other by instituting corruption

army chief. That decade made But Nawaz's insistence on the civilian or democratic governold superior judiciary being ments a laughing stock in the brought back after Musharraf establishment and to an extent in

The same game is now in place. Sharif and his brother have been PPP ministers, it cannot continue to rule. Zardari has said that he will That made Nawaz and Zardari not be a president without powers, cooperation impossible and negating the earlier demands of PML(N) walked out of the coalition undoing all the amendments made by earlier dictators.

 Zardari has shown his priorities. He is not bothered about the relations with the US or the various insurgencies that are going on in the country or the economy that is about to become insolvent if it is coalition, but a whole set of moves not bailed out soon. Much of the country remains without power for up to 12 hours a day. His first prior-1990s. A sorry progress that the country has made.

M. B. Naqvi is a leading Pakistani columnist.