

## Election drama must end

*Accommodation is the need of the hour*

By the time this editorial appears in print, we expect that the issues centering on the holding of the December general elections will have been resolved to the satisfaction of the political parties and the caretaker government. It is our hope that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party will have decided on a course of action that will take account of the long-term future of Bangladesh's democracy. We have always believed that a principle of give and take should take centre stage in politics. A spirit of mutual accommodation should prevail in order for the national interest to triumph.

We reiterate today our conviction that we have always advocated an election in which all political parties can take part and one that will produce credible results. In doing so, we only echo the feelings of the people of the country. These feelings, let us add, have always been robustly oriented to the holding of a credible and purposeful election participated by all parties. Let it be made clear that there is simply no scope for a misreading of the public mind because citizens are today fully disposed to elections and a return to democratic government. There can, therefore, be no reason for any political group or party to hold the elections hostage to any unreasonable demands at this crucial point when the nation is on the threshold of a new beginning. Moreover, it is our belief that a good deal of room yet exists for all the sides to the issue --- the political parties and the government -- to bridge the differences that yet prevail around the elections.

Inasmuch as we are able to understand, there is at this stage yet a likelihood of the elections being deferred to 28 December so that all parties can go wholeheartedly into the polling. Such a possibility, if it comes to pass, will certainly provide a way out of the imbroglio for all sides. We expect a positive attitude to such a possibility from all the parties. However, we also would like to make it clear that in case of a deferment of the polling, the people must be reassured that no new demands will be made and no more questions will be raised that might further complicate the holding of the elections. The political parties owe it to themselves and the nation to come forward with such a commitment. Such reassurance on the part of the parties surely will square up with the demands of the times.

If a consensus on December 28 as the day of election is agreed upon by all sides, then the government should set a specific date for withdrawal of emergency. We think the day following last date of withdrawal of nomination could be that date. Political parties will, we hope and believe, ensure peaceful conduct of campaign, and such a pledge from them will encourage the CTG to withdraw emergency.

All in all, this tense drama on election must end constructively.

## Corruption in government health sector

*The impunity culture has to go*

THE Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in its drive against institutional graft has revealed many a skeleton in the cupboards of public health care and family planning sectors. The scale and depth of corruption and malpractice encompassing 27 areas in different institutions under the health ministry that have been revealed make a sad tale of disservice to public healthcare. This is an eye-opener, if one were needed, to the deteriorating state of heath service in the country. This is not to say though, good, honest work is not done, but that seems rather outweighed by the price corruption exacts from the system.

What happened at the apex of the pyramid might well have been a trend-setter for the structure down below. At the health ministry, health directorate and family planning directorate, corruption has been noticed in such areas as project formulation and implementation; appointment, transfer, posting, promotion and deputation; allocation and grants; training; tender and purchase. Even processing of pension cases is not spared.

Doctors are apt to set aside official duties to engage in their personal commercial pursuits. The other forms of maladies include deficit in medicine purchase, black marketing of drugs, under-use of costly equipment, the list can go on and on.

It is good to learn that the health ministry sees eye to eye with the ACC on the problems of corruption and seeks to combat these in concert. In the meeting between the ACC and the health ministry held on Wednesday, the former gave some suggestions to the latter by way of building up resistance within the institutions as well as awareness amongst the public against corrupt practices.

While the above approach has merit, we believe that specific instances of corruption should be pursued till punitive action is taken against those found guilty.

## Analysing love

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AMERICAN songwriter Irving Berlin once wrote: "There may be trouble ahead, but while there is moonlight and music and love and romance, let us face the music and dance." If you read science, it throws cold water on that excitement.

Temperature depends on the velocities of molecules. Music and melody are just variations in the pressure of air, and colours or lights are nothing but electro-magnetic waves. When you get to love, the facts are even more threadbare. Lovers are nothing but cocktails of chemicals. Love is chemical reactions triggered by hormones and neurotransmitters.

For example, love at first sight, the greatest dictum of romantic overture, is driven by lust which is a magnetic field created by two hormones, testosterone and estrogen. In the next stage of romantic progression, lovers feel love-struck. These are also wonders of hormones. Increased blood levels of adrenaline and cortisol have the charming effect when lovers bump into each other. Their hands sweat, hearts pound, and mouths go dry.

Then a neurotransmitter named dopamine stimulates desire and pleasure, having the same effect on the brain as cocaine does. Lovers feel increased energy, less need for sleep, focused attention and exquisite delight in each other's company. Finally comes serotonin, which is one of love's most potent potions, an obsessive-compulsive behaviour which keeps lovers popping up in each other's minds. If we think love is blind, the credit goes to this particular neurotransmitter.

In stage three, attachment grows between lovers, which keeps them together. Two major hormones oxytocin and vasopressin are responsible for it, and men and women release these hormones during orgasm and after sex. The theory goes that the more copulation a couple has,

## CROSS TALK

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So, when Laila committed suicide and a distraught Majnu died at her grave, it was at best a tragic case of hormonal overdose. In a similar overflow of chemicals, Shirin and Farhad took their own lives with a pickaxe, and Romeo took poison before Juliet stabbed herself with a knife. A poor Devdas drank himself to death, muttering Parvati's name until his last breath.

Love analysed is nothing more than a hoax. Song and dance, moonlight, candle-light dinner, amusing stories, tasteful dress-up, fragrance, and ambience, there is so much to stimulate the hormones, which further stimulate the molecules. Then colours change, music plays and hearts dance. Lovers' exuberance is comparable to a drunken spree under the influence of alcohol.

In many ways, love intoxicates, and lovers live in continuous mood swing under that influence. They are restless, argumentative, paranoid, fluctuating in their emotions, now ecstatic, now melan-

cholic, never too sure if one equally loves the other. Lovers are two parameters chasing an elusive equation.

Love at one stage becomes desperate for union. It aspires for marriage when it runs the risk of liquidating itself like the tree that dies after it fruits. For reasons, which psychologists are yet to determine, if love fails to culminate in union it creates a vacuum, when bad feelings drive good feelings out of circulation.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the unresolved passion between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw eventually destroys them and many around them. In his unrequited love for Parvati, Devdas seeks refuge in alcohol, abandons his family and reduces himself into a wretched vagabond.

Psychologist John Lee writes in his book, *The Color Wheel*, that just like there are three primary colours, there are also three primary styles of love. Eros is the first style, which means loving an ideal person. Then comes Ludos, which is love as a game. The third style is Storge, which uses love as friendship.

These three primary styles, in permutation and combination, produce three secondary styles. Mania, or obsessive love, is a combination of Eros and Ludos. Pragma, or realistic love, is a combination of Ludos and Storge, whereas Eros and Storge produce the

rare style of selfless love, which is when lovers fall in love with love itself.

History bears out that in 700 million years of human race, men and women coveted and discarded each other only in marriage and divorce. But romantic love didn't exist until 800 years ago, popularised in Europe by the French Troubadours. In that sense, romantic love, as we know it today, is not a natural but an acquired mental state.

An existentialist philosopher named James Park argues that Helen of Troy, which Homer wrote 3000 years ago, was mostly about one royal who sought revenge against another for stealing his wife. It had so much to do with pride of a man, but nothing to do with love for his woman.

So what about all the men and women in history who took their lives for love, plunging from height, drowning in water, taking poison, and by hanging, stabbing and gunshot? Are they freaks of nature, its byproducts, people who live to love compared to most others who love to live? These are men and women who enjoy moonlight and music, love and romance, without a clue of the trouble ahead of them.

Besotted by love, they don't realise that life is too short to indulge in a bubble inside a bubble. Prospero says it more aptly in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "We are such stuff as dreams are made of; and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

Love is a wonderful feeling for as long as it feels wonderful. But that feeling doesn't last forever. In the end, lovers run out of love, hatred in separation, habit in union. A young man I knew gave his life under a speeding train after his beloved got married to another man. He didn't live to see that she died of cancer in two years. Love like life is as good as it lasts.

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## The economic partition that still grounds us

M.J. AKBAR

IMAGINE, if you will, a nation unborn; the map of the Indian subcontinent had the Indian subcontinent not been subdivided in 1947 and 1971.

Pakistan and Bangladesh are facts. It is idiocy to sneer at them as failed states. You have to look at facts without the sticky impediment of sentiment. After much consideration, with cold evidence in front of me, I am pleased to announce a personal somersault. After years of examining the validity, or otherwise, of the seeds that nurtured the idea of Pakistan, I am now relieved that it came into existence.

Who would ever have believed what Pakistan has grown up into, if it had never been born at all?

Who could have convinced two generations of post-1947 Indian Muslims that Pakistan was not the heaven that had dominated its advertising before partition? Six decades later, every Muslim of the subcontinent knows that suicide bombs and Kalashnikovs can extract a daily diet of death even in a country where there is no Hindu to call an enemy. Facts are the coolest needles to puncture fevered fantasy.

Pakistan was only ever a very partial answer to what the British called the "Muslim question." By 1971, with the emergence of Bangladesh, the partial became twice partitioned. 1971 also proved that the slogan that created Pakistan, "Islam in danger!" was a concoction designed to serve politicians, and not save the faith.

As Maulana Azad repeatedly emphasised, even when the winds were against him, Islam is a brotherhood, not "nationhood." If Islam were sufficient

## BYLINE

1947 was a geographical and political partition, a screaming laceration through the heart. Since then we have had a silent partition: the economic partition of India. The educated middle classes and the rich are rising with rising India; the rest are stagnant.

to create a modern nation state, the Arabs would not be divided into 22 countries. They even have a language in common.

Indian Muslims now know that Pakistan has bounced in and out of army rule, to land, today, in a quagmire that might have neither the freedom of democracy nor the frigid certainty of dictatorship.

Fatima Bhutto, Benazir's niece, does have a grudge against uncle Asif Zardari; she believes her father, Murtaza, was shot dead in a family power struggle. But the opening sentence of her recent piece in the New Statesman (October 30) is startling enough to demand attention.

Pakistan's newly elected government, she writes, is "the first in the world headed by two former convicts (between them the president and the prime minister have served time on charges of corruption, narcotics, extortion and murder, no less...)"

A state may not fail, but a profligate government can teeter on the edge of bankruptcy. Pakistan's desperation for a bailout loan is not news. What deserves a headline is that its closest allies, including China and

Saudi Arabia, have had enough of the loan-bowl. Zardari cobbled together something called "Friends of Pakistan," only to discover that friendship doesn't fetch dollars.

The top priority of its ambassador in Washington, Hussain Haqqani, is to plead for \$10 billion as reward for participation in America's "war on terror."

Individuals have always been mercenaries; this could be a case of a whole army being parlayed for cash. The Pentagon audits the money Pakistan gets for military operations. If the Pakistan army is fighting on the Afghan border in defence of its national interest, why would it send a bill to Washington?

The leadership of a nation forged out of millions of dreams seems to have lost its sense of nationalism. Paradoxically, the sense of a great national destiny would have flourished if the nation had been denied an existence.

But the discomforts of Pakistan are of little comfort to Indian Muslims. They are convinced now that 1947 was a mirage; but there is too much fog between them and

the next horizon. The principles of the Indian Constitution, sustained by democracy and secularism, are the ideal commitments for any group that considers itself disadvantaged. But neither democracy nor secularism is an industry offering jobs. Economics has flattened the world into a racetrack, and not every community is in the race.

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This was not conceived on communal lines and yet, as the dice has rolled, it involves communities, whether tribals or Dalits or Muslims. The Sachar Commission report is a snapshot portrait of the utter neglect that Muslims have suffered under largely Congress governments. Check with the community and the grievance is unequivocal: others get reservations, we get enquiry commissions.

The Congress mantra for Muslims, its favourite vote bank, has been a single emotion, fear: after us, the deluge. If you don't keep us in power, saffron will strangle you. It works, but only up to a point.

As the clichés on dozens of book covers suggest: the Indian elephant has lumbered towards take-off, the tiger has launched its spring. The India of yesterday's imagination is turning slowly, untidily into a reality, hiccups notwithstanding. But does every Indian deserve the privilege of imagination, or it is reserved only for those who emerged from the womb of luck?

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## Holding pattern

JOHN BARRY

AMERICAN elections are a powerful drug: they bring delusions of omnipotence. Talk of "change" and "hope" demands swift action: "Do it now," "first six months," "hundred days."

The economic crisis may demand speed, but in foreign policy the reality is that President Obama will face the same challenges that President Bush did. And none presents much opportunity for bold new initiatives.

That's fortunate. Incoming presidents making big decisions in a hurry is a recipe for error. Think JFK and the Bay of Pigs. More recently, George W. Bush's reflexive ditching of the Clinton administration's strategy on North Korea was a misstep that took years to retrieve.

The foreign-policy and national-security inbox shows that, even on pressing issues, Obama has the luxury of time. A quick overview:

### Iraq

Obama has pledged to withdraw US troops. But that's already getting under way. At issue still: the pace of the draw-down, a date for final disengagement, and the number of US troops who should then remain as last-ditch guarantors of a democratic government in Baghdad. No Iraqi politician is going to be able to engage seriously on those topics until after their own elections next fall.

### Afghanistan

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reviews: one the White House is wrapping up now, and a wider-ranging one that the new boss of Central Command, Gen. David Petraeus, aims to complete by February. Fresh troops will be flowing into Afghanistan by then. Until the Taliban surge has been beaten back -- which will take at least a year, probably longer -- any notion of negotiating with them, at anything except the micro-local level, is just happy talk.

### Pakistan

Realistically, there is no option but to continue support for a fledgling civilian government, which is proving to be both more resolute and more competent than many had predicted. The US military is already stepping up its efforts to discreetly train and equip Pakistan's military. The IMF, thankfully, has the politically unpopular task of pushing through much-needed economic reforms.

### Iran

Obama has talked about talks. But a failed negotiation, early in his tenure, would squander his international standing and limit his options on Iran. Months of careful diplomacy -- reinforced by the pressure of

falling oil prices -- will be required to see if the Iranian leadership is willing to make a deal on its nuclear program.

### Korea

Heroic efforts by Condi Rice and negotiator Chris Hill have come tantalisingly close to a settlement on North Korea's nuclear program. What's needed now is not some US "initiative" but rather patient work stitching together the last pieces of the deal.

### Israel and the Palestinians

Every president is urged to commit time and clout to settling this long-running conflict. But Israel won't have a government able to commit to anything until well after next February's elections and perhaps not even then. Nor do the Palestinians have a leadership that unites its warring factions. Obama is off the hook for months -- time enough to decide if he really wants to embroil the US in this quagmire yet again.

### Russia

President Dmitry Medvedev, in brusquely threatening to deploy medium-range missiles in Kaliningrad unless new administration abandons plans for missile defenses in central Europe, has just done

Obama a huge favour. No American president could possibly back down in the face of so crude a threat, and no government in Europe would want him to.

At the same time, the more Medvedev threatens, the more he undercuts Russia's efforts at rapprochement with its former satellites. Obama's response? If Medvedev doesn't want US missile defenses in central Europe, he and Putin must help wring a deal from Iran.

### Venezuela

President Chavez would bask in the status conferred by some "initiative" by the new administration. But US wants nothing from Chavez that he is remotely likely to deliver -- political liberalisation at home, for example. Absent that, Chavez remains a blusterer best left to the other governments of the region to contain.

Surely there must be some foreign or national-security matter on which an incoming Obama administration could make a big splash?

Guantanamo is the obvious choice. Obama has pledged to close the detention camp. Certainly that would be the single most potent symbol of "fresh start" by a new administration. Yet, even here Obama will face problems.

The Bush administration has been quietly cutting the numbers at Gitmo for a couple of years. A sizeable fraction of those still held are, on the available evidence, seriously determined Al Qaeda members. If Gitmo closes, what should be done with them?