

We hope Ashraf's suggestion is serious

Neither party should set conditions

THE 14-Party alliance has sought specific proposal from the BNP on an interim arrangements for holding the next general elections. From this and from the statements of the BNP on the issue recently we detect an area of convergence of ideas on the seemingly intractable issue of how the next parliamentary elections are going to be held.

The impression that we get from what the senior leaders of the two alliances are saying, notwithstanding the reported stand articulated by the PM, that the caretaker system is not in the reckoning and that the next election would be held under the current government, that neither of the parties are averse to discussions on the issue. And the BNP, if we read correctly, is willing to call the arrangement by any name as long as it was non-party.

That being the case there is that sliver of chance that the two parties must seize to expand upon. However, we feel that even in the latest statements of the two alliances their is a hint of conditionality, the AL insisting on the BNP's coming up with proposals on the interim arrangement while the BNP is saying that they would be willing to commit in writing provided the AL agreed first to not hold the elections under the it.

We feel it is not for the AL to ask for suggestions, because it is the AL and not the BNP that did away with the caretaker system. And it should fix or replace the system that it had done away with. And we believe that both the parties are alive to the outcome should they fail to resolve the stalemate.

One would not be remiss to suggest that the expectations of the public is that this issue be addressed and resolved forthwith because in it lies the seeds of future flux in the country. And one would not be wrong either to suggest that a credible and acceptable election can be conducted only by a non-party dispensation.

It is time to dispense with preconditions for talks. There is an accord of thoughts which must be used to tide over the likely impasse. We cannot brook failure. And, as it has been always our stand, the ruling party must take the first step.

RMG workers' unrest in N'ganj

Vandalism cannot serve their cause

NEARLY ten thousand garment workers on Sunday took to the streets in Narayanganj, protesting attacks on one of their trade union leaders. As they went on vandalizing shops and blocking the Dhaka-Sylhet highway, they embroiled in a violent clash with law enforcers leaving several workers and law enforcers injured. This is yet another instance of how lack of coordination between workers and garment factory owners can lead to a mayhem which otherwise could have been averted.

Attack on a trade union leader by unidentified assailants could be a cause for consternation amongst the workers who have all the rights to demand immediate arrest of the assailants. However, instead of resorting to violent agitation they could have sought to drive home their demand through peaceful means. Vandalising shops and vehicles cannot be condoned. If innocent people are made to bear the brunt of their grievances, it is ultimately the workers' cause that will lose ground as well as people's support.

Since the massive labour agitation for wage hike in 2010, there followed several other incidents of labour unrest with Saturday's one being the latest. For all we know, excepting the one for wage hike, most others were fomented either by rumours of death or by instigations from vested quarters. As well as revealing the poor, unsettling state of affairs, it reflects the poor worker-management relations.

Our garment factories owners should find ways to motivate their workers properly. They should also have a platform where workers would receive counseling and be able lodge their complaints.

We also think that instead of inciting workers to grow violent on petty grounds, trade unions should work to

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 29

- 1948** Creation of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
- 1953** Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay become the first people to reach the summit of Mount Everest, on Tenzing Norgay's (adopted) 39th birthday.
- 1954** First of the annual Bilderberg conferences.
- 1964** The Arab League meets in East Jerusalem to discuss the Palestinian question, leading to the formation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization.
- 1988** U.S. President Ronald Reagan begins his first visit to the Soviet Union when he arrives in Moscow for a superpower summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.
- 1990** The Russian parliament elects Boris Yeltsin president of the Russian SFSR.

Going nuclear: Are we ready to face the challenges?



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE draft bill of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Control Act 2012 has been approved by the cabinet last week, paving the way for the formation of a separate regulator to look after nuclear safety issues that will eventually come when the Rooppur nuclear power plant is commissioned. The bill has several interesting provisions. Section 43 states that the Russian operator Rosatom will take total responsibility for any damages caused due to accident at the plant, subject to proof of negligence by operator. Secondly, the operator will also bear responsibility for theft, loss or abandonment of nuclear material. The company will provide fuel for the lifespan of the power plant and spent fuel will be taken away for safe storage.

From what has been stated above, there is room for further scrutiny on a number of issues. According to Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority, the country will need 400 engineers to build the plant. Timeline for plant commissioning ranges between 8-12 years from now. This will prove to be a major challenge for the engineering universities and whether or not the country will be able to pool together necessary human resources to pull off this feat is a subject matter of another discussion.

Though the proposed Act states that the operator is going to be held responsible for physical safety of nuclear material, the risks associated with theft affect not only national but regional security. Of more concern is to what extent safeguards are going to be taken from a future accident leading to a meltdown. Needless to say, any such accident along the lines of Fukushima Daichi plant in Japan will have disastrous effects in a densely populated country like Bangladesh that has, of late, been experiencing increased seismic activity. Unlike Japan with its four decades of experience in generating nuclear power, Bangladesh lacks the experience, the emergency response institutions and the financial



Should more time be required to bring in international technical experts to scrutinise the nitty-gritty details of the Act so that Bangladesh is not left high-and-dry at the end of the day, then such time should be taken.

resourcefulness to tackle any such incident. Ruling aside the financial aspect, building up capabilities in other areas will require a timeline that extend into decades of operating nuclear technology.

Though the agreement allows for Rosatom to take spent nuclear fuel (SNF) back to Russia, the complexities involved in transportation of SNF in terms of specialised casks and equipment are another area of concern. According to a case study published by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) titled "Return of Research Reactor Spent Fuel to the Country of Origin: Requirements for Technical and Administrative Preparations and National Experiences," German companies specialising in transport casks for SNF were contracted to transport back Brazilian SNF to the United States. These casks are built to very high safety standards: "The transport cask GNS 11 and GNS 16 are designed in a sandwich construction. The cylindrical cask basically consists of the following components: inner liner with inner liner bottom, lead filling, and wall with bot-

tom plate, side wall cover sheet with spacer wire, head ring, primary lid and protective plate. The components of the cask body and the primary lid are manufactured in stainless steel. In the terms of the transport regulations, the 'leak-tight containment' consists of the inner liner, the inner bottom plate, head ring, primary lid, with the bolt joint, and the internal seal of the two concentric Viton seals. Cap screws are used in order to fasten the primary lid. The closure lid is also fastened to the primary lid using cap screws. In order to achieve the shielding effect, the space between the inner liner and the shell is filled with lead casting. A pair of trunnions is bolted on to the head ring in order to attach handling devices. During transport, the cask is provided with a protective plate. In order to reduce the shock loads arising during the eventual drop of the cask, as stipulated for type B packaging, impact limiters made of wood with a steel-plate shell are attached to the ends of the cask body on the lid and bases sides."

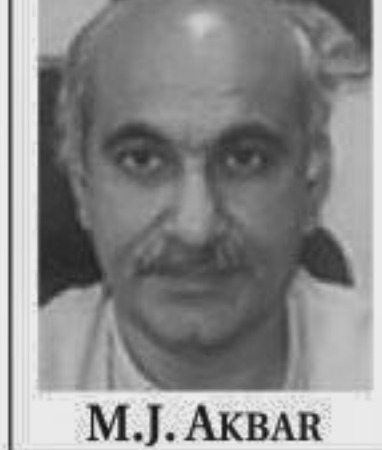
That is not all, transportation of these "casks" required a massive secu-

rity operation involving several law enforcement agencies and the highway and main avenues and streets in Sao Paulo were closed during the operation. Personnel involved in shipment of containers were constantly monitored by radiation protection teams and IAEA members. The boat, once it left port, was escorted by a naval vessel until it reached international waters.

Given the elaborate security and safety measures involved in the case presented above, one could easily be led to question whether such measures can be undertaken to transport SNF from the Rooppur site all the way to Chittagong port for shipment back to country of source, i.e. Russia. These are matters that cannot be relegated to later years; rather, they must be fully addressed in the draft bill before it is enacted into law. Should more time be required to bring in international technical experts to scrutinise the nitty-gritty details of the Act so that Bangladesh is not left high-and-dry at the end of the day, then such time should be taken.

BYLINE

Should the best man remain a bachelor?



M.J. AKBAR

MARGINS cannot determine the fate of the text. At the moment, the story of the next elections to Rashtrapati Bhavan is in neither array nor disarray: it is blank, because the principal political parties, Congress and BJP, have not written anything down. The Congress refuses to name a candidate; the BJP is under no compulsion to hurry. It might seem, from environmental chatter, that a whirlwind candidate like P.A. Sangma is making some progress, but he is merely blotting the page with blobs of ink. In this phase the best candidates write in invisible ink, which is faintly visible under close scrutiny but should disappear from view under the glare of too much attention.

The fluid nature of numbers on either side of the political divide has made this election a game not of action, but of reaction. We can take the sporting analogy further. The Congress game, strategised by Sonia Gandhi, is to play for a draw till regulation time, and then blitz-win in the penalty shootout. If she does not act till the very last minute, she denies her opponents the chance to mobilise a reaction. In a penalty shootout, the option before Congress allies is clear: either each of them scores a goal and ensures victory, or UPA collapses and they force a midterm poll. Leaders like Sharad Pawar may try and flex muscle during regulation play, but Mrs. Gandhi knows that he is more bluster than threat. He has no interest in inviting an election which his party will lose in Maharashtra. He might not win in 2014 either, but at least there are two years left in office, with its attendant rewards.

DMK will have to take a similar call, but there is a faint chance -- perhaps a very faint one -- that its

response might be more ambivalent. All parties know that the key determinant in the electorate's mood next time will be the level of anger against the Congress. This is why Mamata Banerjee and Karunanidhi distance themselves from Congress whenever it takes an unpopular decision like the fuel price hike. They organise a "protest" in an anxious bid to deflect popular wrath towards the Congress. It is pretty obvious that this is an utterly fake protest, since they will live with the decision and continue to support Congress. Voters understand this duplicity, up to a point; and that point is

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nearing. There will come a moment when DMK might feel that it is no longer in its electoral interest to associate with a party that is visibly losing the plot in what was once its core strength, governance. That moment may not come in July 2012, but it is hovering on the horizon.

Mrs. Sonia Gandhi could end all speculation in the space of a few seconds, by announcing Pranab Mukherjee as her candidate. He cannot be more transparent about his desire for promotion. He would, moreover, win on a trot, as neither the BJP nor the Left will contest his claim. His stature is substantially higher than anyone else on the Congress list. Pranab Mukherjee is in the curious position of being everyone's favourite choice except Sonia Gandhi's. We do not know why she trusts him with the governance of India but not with a decora-

tive residence in a British-built palace. The official reason, that Mukherjee is too valuable where he is, was used five years ago and has worn thin. Pranab Mukherjee is being condemned to bachelorhood just because he is such a good best man at every wedding.

It is truly odd that Congress should risk an election which just might go wrong during overtime, rather than make Pranab Mukherjee President of India with convincing ease long before the final whistle is blown. Of course, things might change quickly: Mrs. Gandhi could play it safe after token consultations. But the greater possibility is that she will nominate someone like the current Lok Sabha speaker Meera Kumar at the very last minute, and then let the dust settle in her favour. She may have already got the support of her most temperamental ally, Mamata Banerjee, since Mamata Banerjee considers Pranab Mukherjee a "world citizen" rather than a Bengali.

But the text of an uncertain election will be written in Lucknow, not Calcutta. Mulayam Singh Yadav will not be a marginal factor; he will have a page of his own. Meera Kumar gives him little traction, since he does not get the Dalit vote; he could lead a non UPA consolidation around a Muslim candidate like Abdul Kalam, or Hamid Ansari, if either agreed to contest. Moreover, Mayawati will not want Meera Kumar for exactly the same reason that Mamata is resisting Mukherjee: competition for pre-eminence.

Never discount the possibility that while everyone is playing football, someone opens a chess-board. An astute chess player waits for the queens, knights, bishops and castles to fall, and then suddenly promotes an unsuspected pawn to queen. Check, mate.

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