

## Top-most leaders exchange salvos

Politics getting too acrid for any good

**B**IGGER the BNP and Awami League occasions, greater the stridency and acrimony one sees traded off between the two major political parties. Earlier in the week, BNP had a massive political rally at Paltan to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary of the party. The elaborate programme chalked out to observe the party silver jubilee was dedicated to commemorating Ziaur Rahman, the founder president of the party. A day before, the opposition Awami League held a massive rally at the same venue coinciding with the party's month-long mourning programme commemorating Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of Bangladesh. The occasions bore great significance to the respective political parties for obvious reasons.

In spite of the given import and aura of the memorial events, these not only turned atavistic in pitting Bangabandhu's image against Ziaur Rahman's and vice versa, as if one excelled over the other, but the speeches delivered by two top leaders from their respective podiums were marked by a high voltage trading of vitriol. The exchange of invectives has been pegged to the political murders galore of which the most nerve-racking one centred around the ghoulis gunning down of Manzurul Imam, a widely reputed Khulna Awami League leader.

Prime Minister Begum Zia harangued 'a party' saying it killed its own people to create lawlessness and unrest in the country. Referring to a 'deep-rooted conspiracy of a political party against the country, a particular party that resorted to violence', she asked the people in the massive rally to politically face the 'liars and conspirators'. Not long ago, at her speech in the Political Science Association meet she had given a call for consensus-building. As the prime minister of the country, she was expected to hold on to the positive approach without giving into knee-jerk reactive politics to the vagaries of any fluctuating temper in opposition politics. Her dooms-day predilection to opposition politics being 'destructive', a reminder of the same AL disposition in power towards the then opposition BNP, can only spread the chasm between the two major political parties as the nation reels in unabated social insecurity and economic uncertainty.

As time rolls on, a feeling takes hold that the PM can't rise above the party to be the prime minister for the whole country. What signal the police or the investigating agencies involved in ferreting out the culprits of the murder of Manzurul Imam and that of others are getting from the blanket accusation against the opposition? Police may have already been thrown off-gear or are treating the matter as a closed chapter or are going through the motions of investigation just for the heck of it.

Earlier, Hasina reportedly in a sweeping diatribe said that the prime minister herself was behind the Khulna killing of AL district leader Imam. In a blanket fashion she even referred to what she called an alliance government's plan to kill 10,000 AL leaders 'having already done to death 24,000 since October 1, 2001' when she lost power.

Now is the time to topple the government, says the Awami League. And the BNP's diatribe is: watch out the opposition for its conspiratorial role.

The two leaders' unsubstantiated, incredible and sweeping observations against each other solely triggered by the political murders syndrome has been disquieting beyond measure because a single obsession is shaking the entire polity to its very foundations. The intensity of political confrontation has scaled new heights of absurdity.

We are greatly distressed by the fact that when we juxtapose their vitriol against the deterioration in law and order or exacerbation of political confrontation, we come to the conclusion that one thing is leading to the other, as if in a bowling synchronisation effect. Need we recall that six chamber bodies recently voiced their grave concern over having their backs to the wall due to growing insecurity of life, property and business concerns. The resident chief of World Bank has added his voice to the cause saying that abduction of businessmen is likely to tell upon the investment prospects of the country.

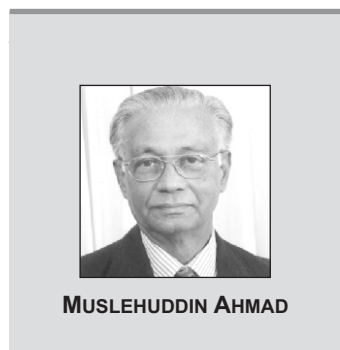
Pray, when will our leadership learn that the type of politics they have given us can only lead them, and the whole country, to self-attrition. The voters expect much better than that from their leaders.

ESAM SOHAIL writes from Kansas, USA

**T**Hese folks are here, they are well funded, well motivated, and evidently well-armed. Their intentions are not hidden any more either. They seek to create a perfect militant theocratic state upon the corpse of an albeit imperfect pluralist democracy they loathe. This is the same democracy that required a down payment of three million martyrs and regular installment payments of hundreds more every time autocracy raised its ugly head. The names and methods of these shadowy outfits are different. Yet, their objective is the same: undermining our democracy by unleashing terror in the hearts of helpless citizens. If protecting the life and liberty of its citizens is the prime duty of a government, as indeed it ought to be, then the government of the day has its work cut out for it.

Simply banning a given organisation and arresting a few cadres is but a temporary cure. Such measures, as temptingly alluring as they are, correspond to giving chemotherapy to address cancer when what is

# Only end of occupation can bring peace in Iraq



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

With the withdrawal of the US and the UK occupation forces and dissolution and departure of the present unrepresentative Governing Council, the normalcy would return and security restored in Iraq. The UN then can establish a mechanism in consultation with the Iraqi people to have the general election in the near future to establish a democratic government.

**T**HE UN has not yet come up with any precise definition of terrorism. The general view appears to be that those who occupy others' homes forcefully on false pretences and kill people without putting them through national or international legal process should be branded as terrorists. The use of violence by anyone or members of different groups, regardless of religious identity, should also fall within the definition of terrorism. It's time for the UN to define or redefine terrorism keeping all these in view and act decisively to protect the interests of its members. Otherwise, some big power will again defy the UN and disturb the world peace and stability. This may even lead to the split of the UN and like-minded states may go for formation of their own international groupings.

The devastation on 9/11 and also bombing of US interests in Kenya, Tanzania, etc. are certainly the terrorists' acts. This is why the whole world joined hands with the American Administration to fight terrorism. But unfortunately, Bush Administration squandered the opportunity by defying the UN and attacking Iraq. The US and the UK deliberately destroyed a UN recognised state and its government. A government may be cruel or despot, there are several of such governments in the world, but no other member of the UN has the authority to remove that regime and declare the members of such a regime as criminals. Under what and whose authority, the US and the UK have declared Saddam and his associates criminals and have been arresting them and killing

them? Has the UN declared Saddam and his associates as criminals and persona non-grata in Iraq? If not, then why the UN is not raising these issues formally? It is amazing that UNSC gave recognition to US sponsored Governing Council in Iraq.

The imaginary threat of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction boiled the inner mass of the heads of some leaders for some unacceptable reasons. For Bush Administration, the possible reason could be its fear that Saddam might one day attack Israel; so the threat must be removed. But Tony Blair involvement seems to be his blind personal attachment to Bush ignoring the strong opposition of his people and also that of large majority of people of the world. The obsession of these two leaders about Saddam's imaginary weapons of mass destruction led to the destruction of a UN member; it's people lost their sovereignty that they have been enjoying from time immemorial. Who is responsible for this disaster? The conscious people of the world are raising their voices. It is not only Dr. Kelly, hundreds of American and British soldiers have lost their lives, but for what and for whose benefit? They are still dying in the desert of Iraq. The American and the British families affected by such deaths have started protesting and indeed seriously questioning the very purpose and motive of these leaders who led their countries to an unnecessary and indeed devastating war.

The leader of the US, UK, Australia and Spain are in the dock. Seri-

ous political and moral questions have been raised. The very basis of the war -- imminent threat from Saddam -- was imaginary. The blame is being put on the Intelligence Services of these countries. But as the truth is emerging -- the Intelligence Services put the words like "would", "could" but these were later reportedly magnified by the words like "mammoth" and "massive" (Ref: Andrew Wilkie, former Intelligence man of Australia). It was the political leaders who reportedly "sexed up" the intelligence reports (Andrew Gilligan's report to BBC). These leaders put their own countries and their people into serious security risks. Serious debate and formal inquiry under Lord Hutton have put Prime Minister Blair into

serious political crisis. Blair's Communication Director Alastair Campbell has decided to resign and this may lead to further resignations in Blair's government. Blair's future also appears uncertain. Some form of low-key inquiries are also underway in the US Congress against Bush Administration.

These two leaders, ignoring the views of their own people and of the rest of the world went ahead for regime change in Iraq. Now they themselves may soon face "regime change". 69 sixty-nine per cent of the Americans feel that America is now "bogged down" in Iraq. Unfortunately the innocent people of these countries are facing terrorists' attacks and will continue to face "terrorism" because of the mis-

guided approach and acts of their own leaders. The whole world is now in deep crises. None is safe today anywhere in the world. Nine/eleven and subsequent military actions have divided the world into two camps. This is undoubtedly bad for peace and security of the world.

The UN Headquarters in Baghdad was bombed which killed about 20 people including Vieira de Mello, a top UN diplomat. Why should a UN office which was there to help Iraqis be bombed? No amount of reasons can justify such a ghastly attack, but some Iraqis who did this apparently saw UN as a tool in the hands of the US for Iraq's present misfortune and loss of sovereignty -- as the UN could not stop the unjust war and has joined hands with the occupying powers that gave legitimacy to the hand-picked governing council which does not represent Iraqi people.

Let's be fair, frank and truthful and face facts. In order to bring an end to the present madness in Iraq, the US occupation must end. As the situation stands, the US and the UK are being treated by Iraqis as their enemies and the American and British soldiers are being killed almost everyday. The Iraqis have been openly asking the US and the UK forces to leave Iraq. Even the Shiites in Najaf blamed Americans for the death of their religious leader who died in a serious bomb blast that killed another 90 or so. The reason appears to be that he was "reluctantly" cooperating with Americans through the Governing Council of Iraq. It seems that there is no other alternative for the US and the

UK but to leave Iraq leaving the entire burden on the UN. The UN heavy weights like France, Russia, China and also Germany, India and other countries have reportedly been opposing any UN Resolution that would keep the decision making authority in the hands of the US and the UK.

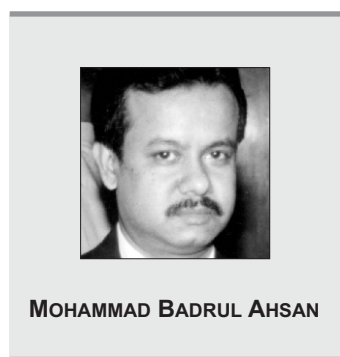
As a result, Bush Administration is now considering UN peace-keeping forces in Iraq under American command. The latest report of Russian President Putin's support for international forces in Iraq under American command was unfortunate and would certainly damage Russian image in the Middle East. American command will continue to vitiate the environment. The UN must not be a party to the illegal occupation. The UN must fully take over and that would encourage all other member states to send peace-keeping troops to Iraq. Such a peace keeping force under the full and strong command of the UN, where there will be no US and UK forces, may bring back the confidence of the Iraqis and come out to support the UN activities. The UN must dissolve the present Governing Council set up by American representative Paul Bremer.

With the withdrawal of the US and the UK occupation forces and dissolution and departure of the present unrepresentative Governing Council, the normalcy would return and security restored in Iraq. The UN then can establish a mechanism in consultation with the Iraqi people to have the general election in the near future to establish a democratic government. Such a step will establish democracy in Iraq and spare the lives of the American and British soldiers. This should be gracefully accepted by the US as this would also fulfill one of the stated US objectives -- "establishment of democracy in Iraq".

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and presently the Vice Chancellor (designate) of Presidency University.



## Analysis of political mind



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**T**HERE was a time when politics was neither a profession nor a hobby, but a privilege for men and women who wanted to serve their country. There was a time when ideology danced in the blood and ideals rocked the heart. There was a time when politics was fight against oppression and injustice, when it was death conquering, selfless and uncompromising. Turn that game on the head, you have the definition of modern politics. Politics isn't what it was before. It has changed its rules.

What happens to the game when the rules change? The old players need to learn new set of skills, or new players, who already have those skills, enter the game. Politics has its own set of skills, and if you leave Lady Luck out, not everybody is cut out to play this game. You need certain attributes to become a politician. You must have people skills, oratory, presence of mind, courage, ambition, stamina, charisma, guile and patience. Politicians needed these attributes before, as they need them now. So, what has changed in the rules?

Politics by all means is a spectator sport. You play against your opponent and people watch both.

And winning is always important. That one rule hasn't changed. But there was a time when people wanted to win for others. Politics was about sacrifice, about altruism. Politics was struggle for the down-trodden, for the underprivileged, for the needy and the neglected. Politics was missionary work with a secular heart.

There was a time when politics attracted dedicated people, who were committed to the cause. They were mostly lawyers, bright men and women, who aspired for freedom and equality. They were edu-

only profession for which no preparation was thought necessary. But Albert Camus resented that those who had greatness within them did not go in for politics. According to Samuel Johnson, politics was nothing more than means of rising in the world. Former US President Ronald Reagan sort of explained why that was the case. He said, "Politics is supposed to be the second oldest profession. I have come to realise that it bears a very close resemblance to the first."

That surely explains a lot about politics, particularly the characteris-

tics, which put together the personality of a politician. That explains how he bends to the wind like the reed of grass, how greed is his creed and deception is his devotion, how he changes like a chameleon and wincing like a wimp. It is no coincidence that the first and the second oldest professions on earth both require the protection of the musclemen. Because both professions achieve their target audience, and both are likely to betray those who get emotionally involved with them.

While the oldest profession has remained constant, politics has changed from bad to worse. There was a time when politicians were calculating and selfish with an enlightened heart. They defeated

their opponents, cheated, lied and stonewalled but the purpose was to win their causes, which carried at least the semblance of public good.

Perhaps that is where the rules have changed most, reducing politics from the sublime to the ridiculous. If people don't have respect for the politicians, it's because people don't feel any connection with them. It's because people no longer understand why anyone would enter politics instead of going into some respectable profession. In fact if you really look into it, present politics is mischief two times

rights and make a million dollars. John Dean, an attorney in Nixon White House, wrote a book after the Watergate scandal. Nixon himself wrote memoirs, which sold in millions. But the best example of that is Hillary Clinton. She wrote her autobiography and one of the reasons why it sold like a hotcake was because readers believed she was going to throw light on some of her husband's extramarital affairs.

There was a time when the politicians made their societies as much as the societies also made them. It worked well and politics elevated both in the end. There was a time when politicians dreaded scandals, because that ruined them like water poured in salt. Don't get it wrong. Men had their vices back then as they have now. But there was a time when political ambition required a morality check, when man was held against his reputation, if not anything else.

If you ask me, that has been the biggest change of rule in politics. Look at the posters on the walls and the newspaper ads, congratulating and greeting national leaders. You will find an unknown face plugged at the bottom right corner, who is actually picking up the cost. He wants to become visible, because visibility brings recognition and recognition brings reputation. There was a time when it worked the other way around. Men built reputation first, which brought them recognition, which brought them in politics.

When the rules have changed so much, it leaves you wondering if the same game is still the same.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

There was a time when the politicians made their societies as much as the societies also made them. It worked well and politics elevated both in the end. There was a time when politicians dreaded scandals, because that ruined them like water poured in salt... But there was a time when political ambition required a morality check, when man was held against his reputation, if not anything else.

cated, inspired, devoted and decisive. They coveted power to have a change, not a change to have power.

There was a time when politics had a profile. Politicians needed character and composure, knowledge and vision, at once popularity and singularity in the private domain of public life. There was a time when politics produced paradigms, which shifted from time to time under the leadership of politicians who were the products of their times.

In the United States, the May issue of Psychological Bulletin published a review that statistically summarises dozens of studies conducted over 50 years dealing with psychological differences related to leftwing and rightwing

1938 had described liberalism as morbid. Thus all beliefs have a partial basis in one's needs, fears and desires, including beliefs that form one's political ideology. It was found that liberals could be characterised on the basis of an overall profile as relatively disorganised, indecisive and perhaps overly drawn to ambiguity.

Politics has always been associated with a pathological process, and political behaviour has its psychogenesis. People are shaped by their experience, and upbringing takes its toll. The child learns his manners before he becomes man, and manners harden into mannerism in the course of time.

Robert Louis Stevenson was certain that politics was perhaps the

over. Once when politicians commit crimes, and again when they pretend that they are doing everything for a larger cause.

Since the end of World War II, more than a score of political aides in Japan have killed themselves, usually when seamy under-the-table deals became publicly tied to their bosses. One of Kakuei Tanaka's drivers killed himself during the Lockheed scandal of the 1970's. Ihei Aoki, one of Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita's closest aides and his chief fund-raiser, slit his wrists and hanged himself late last month, hours after Mr. Takeshita announced his plan to resign.

In other societies, corrupt politicians and their aides would testify, then write a book, sell the movie

and democracy. This enemy believes that the end justifies the means. Be it terrorism, armed insurrection, hateful literature, and even pure murder, the enemy knows of no bounds in its effort to subjugate our people under its warped sense of the divine mandate.

The machinery of state that has so often been used to intimidate political opposition and professionals' association can be better deployed to thwart the real enemy lurking in the shadows. Will it not be wiser to deploy the heavy hand of the police to hunt down terrorists instead of raiding women's dormitories?

While the oldest profession has remained constant, politics has changed from bad to worse. There was a time when politicians were calculating and selfish with an enlightened heart. They defeated

## OPINION

# Militancy in our backyard

The machinery of state that has so often been used to intimidate political opposition and professionals' association can be better deployed to thwart the real enemy lurking in the shadows. Will it not be wiser to deploy the heavy hand of the police to hunt down terrorists instead of raiding women's dormitories?

needed is to cut off the tumour. As we have seen elsewhere shadowy groups which are proscribed simply change their name and start their evil work under a new signboard. Far more comprehensive measures are needed to combat this menace. Most importantly there must be the political will to acknowledge the problem and crackdown both on the underground terrorist networks and their above-ground fronts.

Let us call it as it is. While the terrorist cells are found in the remotest corners of the country, some of their sympathisers are ensconced rather close to the centers of power in Dhaka. The occasional speeches

by certain members of parliament are not exactly too different from the pamphlets found in these cells. If the government believes that by giving a little bit of ground to certain elements it will buy the loyalty of like-minded groups around the country, it is being blissfully naïve. Groups that have a philosophical contempt for pluralist democracy can rarely be co-opted permanently into the democratic order. Rather, they use democratic power to arrange the funeral of democracy from the inside. Recent human history is replete with examples like Spain and Germany in the 1930s and Czechoslovakia in the 1940s where demo-

cratic appeasement of non-democratic forces eventually resulted in the death of democracy. It will be wise for the government to review the list of its purported friends. Can groups whose ideology was rabidly anti-Bangladesh and who to date have never apologised for their 1971 role be counted as permanent allies of democracy? One needs to look no further than some of the major educational campuses to see how well treated the ruling party's own student wing is at the hands of its nominal friends.

On the eve of American general elections in 1996, Republican candidate Bob Dole said that Demo-

cratic Bill Clinton was his adversary, not his enemy. Senator Dole was simply describing the ground rules for political partisanship in a democratic order. The BNP government ought not to think of the Awami League as an enemy but rather an adversary. The same goes for the Awami League as well. As disparate as they appear from time to time and as mutually acrimonious as their leaders can be, these two parties have a vested interest in the republican democracy that both struggled to establish through the nine years of autocratic rule. No, the enemy is an ideology that openly disdains the very concepts of liberty, equality,

and democracy. This enemy believes that the end justifies the means. Be it terrorism, armed insurrection, hateful literature, and even pure murder, the enemy knows of no bounds in its effort to subjugate our people under its warped sense of the divine mandate.

The machinery of state that has so often been used to intimidate political opposition and professionals' association can be better deployed to thwart the real enemy lurking in the shadows. Will it not be wiser to deploy the heavy hand of the police to hunt down terrorists instead of raiding women's dormitories? Can we not send BDR battalions to uproot shadowy militants instead of using them to stop Opposition rallies? While we are at it, why not spare an army battalion from Liberia peacekeeping and have it flush out the hatemongers in our own backyard?

Some time ago the government launched Operation Clean Heart with much fanfare. After the recent discoveries of militant outfits in

several rural areas, may be it is time to trigger an Operation Clean Heart to cleanse our hearth of armed bigots whose shadowy dens of hate are seemingly far more numerous and more spread out than previously believed.

Left unattended in today's global situation, the tumour of fanatical militancy can only grow ominously. The only cure for a tumour, before it turns into a full fledged cancer in the body-politic, is to cut it out. It is the duty of this government to resolve itself to fight the militant menace without delay. It is a fight in which no mercy can be shown and no quarter given. Unleash the security forces on their hideouts, freeze their assets and bank accounts, lodge cases against them in the courts, and prevent them from using sanctified houses of worship as meeting halls. Our reputation depends on it, our peace depends on it, our way of life depends on it.

Our democracy depends on it.