

Political lapses and a look forward

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

BUILDING up a sovereign, respectable, economically viable, disciplined, safe and affluent state is probably the undisputed aspiration of any nation or people, and it is not impossible to build up such a state. There may be controversy about the process, priorities, allocation of resources, acceptance of some immediate hardship, but if political will is strong enough and the leadership can earn the confidence of the people, no apparent controversy can stop any nation from achieving its desired, innocent goals.

It is clearly known to the people at what a terrible cost we earned independence in 1971 with a great hope for a great nation, and what have been the success, failures, mismanagement, abuse of power, attempts to usurp people's liberty, succession of leadership, violent change of power, recurrence of the cycle of short-lived hope and longer frustration, pushing us backward and destroying our potentialities for better life within over last three decades. Power was lost so far not due to Opposition's charisma, or some major innocent mistakes, but because, the ruling leadership did not do what the people desired, and the state needed, apprehending that such drastic changes might be unpopular. We may learn from history, but it is no use idly lamenting or rejoicing the past. The Awami League of Sheikh Hasina cannot expect to continue to capitalise on great pre-BAKSAL image of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, nor can BNP of Khaleda Zia continue to capitalise on the mass popularity of Ziaur Rahman. They need to prove their

own capability, vision and strong political will to lead the country to real prosperity to the very high expectations of the general people. They need to have learned, capable and dedicated team of people around them, who share their aims and are ready to face any challenge under all odds, caring for the people's long-term interest.

Now, the reality is that BNP of Begum Khaleda Zia is in power for over two years since October 2001

excesses or extra-constitutional measures, which might create instability or quicken their fall, as seen in the past. If people are to pin hope on some leadership just to be betrayed by them every time, more undesirable and unpredictable time might be forthcoming for our next generation, and the future of the state.

People are longing for seeing a dedicated government that can steer the country to stability, honour-

Unfortunately, our policies--administrative, monetary, fiscal, educational, industrial, infrastructural, technological, trade, communication, transportation, international co-operation, foreign investment, energy, utility service, cultural and so on, were/are cooked up by some people around the power and the higher echelon of administration, whose priorities are not necessarily the long- and short-term interest of the people or the

here and there. This is absolutely shameful and a disgrace to the very fundamental wisdom of our people. The World Bank and IMF staff members meet ministers and even the Prime Minister to give an impression that their unsolicited advice will save the country.

Their audacity reaches such a height that they fix a time frame for implementing their prescriptions, which are not necessarily to serve our purpose anyway. Our own people usually manoeuvre the government to swallow all the shame on behalf of the people. When the damages resulting from their advice will be pointed out someday afterwards, they will say, "We might not have been right" as they confessed many times before. But who will compensate the colossal damages to the social and economic interest of the country? There is nothing wrong in listening to what others say, but it is absolutely for us to do what we should do, and to avoid what we must not do. We should not blame World Bank or IMF, a virtually redundant institution since 1972 when major currencies went floating against gold, that want to find out new jobs for themselves. The fault is our own. We must learn to think of our present and future ourselves and maintain friendly relation with international community for peace in the world, safeguarding our dignity and national sovereignty. Let us have a hope for the future.

Mustafizur Rahman, Ph.D is Chairman, The Institute of Development Strategy, Dhaka. The views expressed here are of the author's own and not necessarily of the organization he represents.

There is nothing wrong in listening to what others say, but it is absolutely for us to do what we should do, and to avoid what we must not do. We should not blame World Bank or IMF, a virtually redundant institution since 1972...We must learn to think of our present and future ourselves and maintain friendly relation with international community for peace in the world, safeguarding our dignity and national sovereignty. Let us have a hope for the future.

for the second time. It has recently highlighted a list of its actions as achievements. Some measures are apparently good, though not that sound and sustainable, but question arises as to whether these claimed achievements are anywhere near what the people want for the change of their fate, or whether they are opposed to people's desires, or whether they are for the benefit of the party or the party men, hoping to clinch to power. The trend of activities will reflect the mind-set of the leadership, and the people will make up their mind before the end of some remaining years of the tenure of power, to trust or not to trust the present administration for their future. When atmosphere will go adverse, they may resort to

able peace, security, self-reliance and affluence in the present difficult world under complex diplomatic and economic realities. It is up to the present ruling leadership to clear off their confusions about their comprehensive, educated policies and strategies vis-à-vis present cosmetic, visible, isolated project preparation with wrong priority or with ulterior motive of direct personal or party gain. It is never late to reverse the trend and start anew in a comprehensive way in the real interest of the nation. The job is hard, demanding and initially may not be popular with all sections of the people, either. Though repeatedly betrayed, the people will appreciate any right, determined goal-oriented policies and actions.

state. They harbour sick thinking that nothing can be done without foreign loans or grants even under any undue and self-defeating conditions, and strive to confuse the political leadership, delay actions when their own purpose is not served, distract their attention to something superficial until time is ripe for likely change of power. There prevails strong tendency to ask for or take foreign assistance unnecessarily even to reform our own administrative system, to modernise judicial system, the banking system, and the like. Just to beautify our city and establish mass transit facilities, or to build a flyover or a bridge, we want foreign aid which we also spend in building, demolishing and rebuilding works

On passing of the grand dame of Cathay



A. H. JAFFOR ULLAH writes from New Orleans

BROWSING through the Internet I came to learn the passing of Madame Chiang Kai-shek. In this age of super fast information highway, we hear about the happenings of the day rather quickly. Madame Chiang died in her sleep at the ripe old age of 106. That is what we learned from a press release issued by the Director-General of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York. According to news, she had been living in seclusion in Manhattan's fashionable Upper East Side since 1975 after the death of her husband. Three years later in 1978, President Jimmy Carter gave recognition to Mainland China abandoning America's longstanding policy of recognising Generalissimo Chiang's China, the island nation of Taiwan. Madame Chiang was so perturbed that she went into seclusion; never did she comment on America's decision to abandon Taiwan in favour of Mainland China.

Kids of my generation who were born right after World War II knew a great deal about Gen. Chiang Kai-shek and his adopted country, the beautiful Island of Formosa. The name Taiwan was not in vogue in the 1950s. When Mao Tse-tung and his Red Army took control of Beijing and the rest of China, Gen. Chiang and his nationalist faithfuls belonging to Kuomintang (KMT) party moved to the southern shore of China and took to the ocean. They moved en masse to Formosa, which used to be under Japanese occupation army only three years ago. The end of WWII changed all that. Gen. Chiang suffered from nostalgia so much that he contemplated about returning to mainland by boating the communist out of office, which remained a pipedream for him and many expatriate mainlanders.

Madame Chiang was born Soong May-ling in China's Kwangtung province. Her father was an aristocrat who sent her daughter to Wellesley College in Massachusetts, America to receive a western and liberal education. Her taste and temperament were very much western. She once had quipped, "The only thing

Oriental about me is my face." She was a stunning woman in her heydays. Her English was superb and often times she voluntarily took the job of translating passages from English to Chinese so that her husband could understand. Chiang Kai-shek joined China's revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen in 1917. Sun Yat-sen was one of the leaders of KMT that overthrew China's last dynasty, the Qing, which had its origin in Manchuria, in 1911.

A stunning Soong May-ling who had very European taste in everything in life fell for the debonair army officer Chiang Kai-shek who was already married then with children. Nonetheless, they married in 1927. She had spell on Chiang so much so that he was converted to Christianity. The West admired the couple while their picture graced the pages of many popular magazines. Madame Chiang used her charm to persuade the West to drive out the invading Japanese from Manchuria and elsewhere in China so that democracy could be established in her motherland. As war raged in Europe and elsewhere, she addressed the joint session of the U.S. Congress in 1943. In 1949, after Mao Tse-tung and his force took control of the mainland, she was lobbying vigorously in the West so that Mao's regime would not receive diplomatic recognition.

After Chiang's death, the KMT elected his son from a previous marriage to be the president of Taiwan. Chiang's KMT party ruled Taiwan for over five decades. However, in 2000, the KMT lost the election for the first time to the Democratic Progressive Party's Chen Shui-bian even though the centenary Madame Chiang endorsing the Nationalist candidate. She saw that both her charm and power had waned over the years. These days Taiwanese politics are being dominated by new generation of Chinese who were born in the Island. Her departed husband's trusted lieutenants are all dead by now.

Madame Chiang was an icon from the last century. She has seen it all -- the defeat of the Qing dynasty by the KMT, raping of the Nanjing by the Japanese army, rise in power by Mao Tse-tung, the KMT part members fleeing the mainland for Formosa, the betrayal by the Americans. She had an eventful life. She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth who grew up to be a glamorous beauty. Her marriage to Chiang was the talk of the town and fodder for gossip. However, as she approached middle life, there were set backs. First her husband died and then America reneged on their promise of not recognising the mainland. She must have felt it strange that even though President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles refused to shake hand with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai, only two decades later President Nixon was desperate enough to make waves at Mao. In no time, ping-pong diplomacy had ensued and before long, George Bush Sr. was sent to China as the U.S. Ambassador. Reality is sometimes stranger than fiction!

The world should not mourn the demise of Madame Chiang. She had a fuller life. She had lobbied very vigorously for the cause of Taiwan. Nonetheless, corporate America was in favour of doing business with the mainland Chinese and surely, they did. These days Chinese factories are humming to produce mass merchandise for the Wal-Mart's of America. The drone produced by these factories would subside any enthusiasm someone in mainland may show for this departed soul who was once a grand dame of Cathay.

Muslims should stop apologising

DR FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

LEGEND has it that President Lyndon Johnson used to arm twist legislators so hard that some Senator or Congressman would simply give up and inform the President that he would vote as the President wished, just to get Lyndon off his back! America's Israeli lobby has mastered the technique of mind twisting. In 1981, when the new Regan administration wanted to sell AWAC early warning planes to Saudi Arabia, American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a pro-Israeli lobbying group, fought it tooth and nail. Although the bill eventually squeaked through, the point was made. Ever since, before proposing a name for any important appointment, the Regan administration would check with AIPAC to make sure it met with their approval! Over the years, the American Jewish lobbies have transformed the adage "squeaky wheel gets the grease" into a refined art. With a view to intimidating Americans, any criticism of Israel is met with a barrage of loud and shrill denunciatory shouts -- literally on television and radio and figuratively in the print media. The shrill sends a chill down the spine of legislators, making them spineless. They are forced to think only one way -- pro-Israel. The US Jews have universally condemned Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's comments. Lest we forget, Mahathir was very civil in his criticism of the Jews. The Jews in America are

anything but ... New York city radio stations regularly use the "b-word," to describe the Malaysian Prime Minister! You know, the word with connotations of illegitimacy!

The *New York Times* published a quarter page ad by The American Jewish Committee on October 26, which read: "SHAME. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad delivered a scathing anti-Semitic speech at the recent meeting of the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Conference. President Bush and several other heads of state

Harold Tanner, President."

Anyone living in the New York metropolitan area cannot escape Mr. David Harris's incessant hate-filled, anti-Muslim bigotry in his radio commercials. For Mr. Harris to pretend to "oppose hatred and stand for a world based on mutual respect" would have been comical had it not been so sinister in intent. His sole aim is to goad Americans into hating Muslims even more, and to deceive the American public, at which his organisation has no peer. He implies, deceitfully as usual,

As Mahathir says: "We are all oppressed. We are all being humiliated. Today, we the Muslim ummah are treated with contempt and dishonour. Our religion is denigrated. Our holy places are desecrated. Our countries are occupied. Our people are starved and killed." So, why should WE, the Muslims apologise, not THEY, our oppressors?

emphatically denounced his comments, but the Muslim leaders assembled for the conference, to their everlasting shame, gave Mahathir a standing ovation. Bigotry is bigotry. When an entire people or religion is assailed, all people and all religions are threatened. At such moments, people of good will need to be heard. History has taught us the danger of silence. SPEAK OUT. Go to www.ajc.org to send e-mails to Malaysia's ambassador to the United States and to the Organisation of Islamic Conference. Let them know you oppose hatred and stand for a world based on mutual respect. Signed David. A. Harris, Executive Director and

through the shameful misrepresentation, "When an entire people or religion is assailed," as though Mahathir had attacked all Jews (he had actually praised some) and the Jewish religion itself (which he absolutely had not!). Such distortion and lies may intimidate Americans suffering from "anti-Semitism label" phobia; it will not intimidate the Muslims. The writer has always condemned suicide bombing against Israeli civilians and had written an entire column denouncing the murderers of Daniel Pearl. He is still waiting for Mr. Harris to criticise one of Israel's thousand of atrocities against the Palestinians. Everlasting shame to you, Mr.

Palestine and Western policies, including the line, "Even among Jews there are many who do not approve of what the Israelis are doing," which should absolve Mahathir of the charges of anti-Semitism in the eyes of the fair-minded people. What none of Mahathir's detractors have done is to come out and flatly say, "He is wrong!" Is Mahathir wrong about "Jews control the world"? Is it not true that the powerful Jewish lobby controls US's political system? Didn't President Nixon's speech writer and twice Republican candidate for the Presidency, Patrick Buchanan, label US Congress as "Israeli occupied territory?" Is it not true that the US has vetoed, killed or diluted every UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israeli crimes? Is it not true that the careers of many Israel-critical US politicians ended at behest of Jewish power and Jewish money (remember African-American Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney's Jewish-financed defeat in 2002)? Is it not true that the people behind President Bush's aggressive Israel-first foreign policy, the neoconservatives, are predominantly Jewish? Is it not true that, led by Israeli agent Deputy Defence Secretary Dr. Paul Wolfowitz, now stomping Iraq as a conqueror, these newcons had a blueprint for invading Israel's enemy Iraq as far back as 1992, well before September 11, and used the latter as an excuse?

Let me cite an example of what the Muslims are up against. A few days ago, the writer attended a seminar given by a panel of Republican legislators, including a US Congressman. They were so afraid of the "anti-Semite" label that they treaded very carefully on any question on Israel. Their favourite line is like Bush's: "the Palestinians must stop the violence." They would not condemn, not even acknowledge Israeli violence! The writer pointed out that there is a perception, not only in the Islamic world, but also in the world at large that America is unjust and unfair in its foreign policy, especially when it comes to Israel, and that is not good for America. The writer added that the three recent US vetoes to protect Israel from paying for its crimes were detrimental to America's long-term interests. (Some legislators professed ignorance of the vetoes!) Finally, in exasperation the writer commented that he detected some reluctance, if not outright trepidation on the panel's part to criticise Israel! The writer's question was like a hot potato, which no one on the panel wanted to handle!

Because of the fear of retaliation from the Jews, Americas have

become de-sensitised to Israeli crimes. When Israel demolishes three apartment complexes or murders ten Palestinians, the news is presented as though Israel had no choice. When Palestinians resist occupation and kill even Israeli soldiers, America's moral backbone shores up, and from Bush on down condemnation rains down on the Palestinian "terrorists." Even CNN gives a pro-Israeli twist to its news coverage. According to CNN, any Palestinian Israel kills are some sorts of a "militant" or a "terrorist." Even when Israel destroys three apartment complexes contravening all international laws against collective punishment, making thousand of Palestinian men, women and children homeless, CNN justifies it by toying the Israeli line, "they were lookout posts!" Thanks to this Jewish-Wolfowitz-Bush convoluted logic, the invaders and occupiers of Iraq are its "liberators," and the Iraqis resisting occupation are "terrorists."

"Every few years, the Jewish lobby 'eliminates' an American politician who does not support the Israeli government unconditionally. This is not done secretly, behind the scenes, but as a public 'execution'. Israel manufactures and exports anti-Semitism that threatens Jews around the world." Words of Mahathir Mohamad? No, these are the words of Uri Avnery, the well-known Israeli peace activist. Just imagine what would have happened if Mahathir Mohamad has uttered those truths? (For the record, President Bush did not condemn Mr. Avnery for his "anti-Jewish" and "anti-Semitic" remarks!) "The days of Holocaust are over. The Zionist state of Israel has become the oppressor." Mr. Avnery added, "David has morphed into a Goliath." "The oppressive state of Israel cannot be allowed to keep everyone hostage based on historical wrongs perpetuated on the Jews by the Christian world." The Muslims are being made to pay for the guilt of the Christians.

The instantaneous condemnation of Mahathir by the high and mighty like President Bush, and Jewish threat of an economic boycott of Malaysia only reinforce Mahathir's point about the stranglehold the Jews have over the world and its leaders. (The Muslim world is still awaiting Mr. Bush's condemnation of Deputy Defence Secretary General Boykin's anti-Muslim tirade.) Under no circumstance should Mahathir apologise for speaking the truth. As Mahathir says: "We are all oppressed. We are all being humiliated. Today, we the Muslim ummah are treated with contempt and dishonour. Our religion is denigrated. Our holy places are desecrated. Our countries are occupied. Our people are starved and killed." So, why should WE, the Muslims apologise, not THEY, our oppressors? If Islam is guilty of harbouring terrorists within its ranks, so are Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Islam, therefore, cannot be singled out as the only religion "hijacked" by terrorists. The terrorists have been hijacked by their personal, distorted beliefs; they have not hijacked the religion they profess to practice. Muslims should stop apologising and stand up for their rights and their religion.

AL deals a tactical blow

WEEKEND NOTES

JAMILUR RAHMAN

POLITICIANS have come dangerously close to casting themselves as belligerents incapable of seeing anything beyond confrontation, not for the first time though.

The BNP and the Awami League had been holding each other responsible for the creaking law and order for a pretty long time. Now the AL has decided to do something more than keeping its adversaries busy in a theoretical duel, which didn't seem to make much of an impression in the past.

Adopting a more direct method, the party has published a list of godfathers in the ruling alliance. It is a tactical blow, marking the end of the strategic manoeuvring.

But it is not clear whether the bombshell exploded with the bang that its designers were hoping for. Nevertheless, the names of 101 ruling party stalwarts on a list of 'godfathers' were not easy for the ruling alliance to swallow. The angry BNP leaders tried to dismiss the move as an 'utter nonsense' and hit back with defamation suits -- the only legal recourse open to them. They are still cursing their foes.

Sheikh Hasina promised to bring more godfathers to public glare before leaving the country on a six-day trip to Germany. She is apparently convinced that there is no way to relent, after the party has committed itself to the warpath.

It seems the psychological impact of the godfathers' list is no less important than its political implications. It is no secret that criminals, the listed ones in particular, maintain some kind of rapport with the political parties, or it could also be other way round.

The sad truth of the matter is that they have found a place in politics. Politicians, on either side of the divide, will perhaps feel a bit embarrassed if asked to explain how men with proven criminal records, or highly questionable backgrounds, could get involved in party activities. There are countless examples of moral and ethical standards being lowered for petty political gains.

So criminals, however condemned in the public eye, are not strangers to the political parties.