

## Is the stage set for history to repeat itself?

**It seems that the politicians at the helm of state have very short memories. Before the former PM Sheikh Hasina appointed the CEC, M A Sayeed, she wrote to the then leader of the opposition Begum Khaleda Zia, not once, but twice to sit with her to appoint a consensus person. Begum Zia turned down the invitation and instead asked the PM to resign. Following the appointment of M A Sayed, BNP called hartal and created commotion, lead by Moudud Ahmed, at the oath-taking ceremony.**

MOZAMMEL H KHAN

THE prime minister has at last come out of any ambiguity. What the leaders of the opposition political parties have apprehended and told the nation so far about the so-called "dialogue drama" has turned out to be true. The PM has now spelled out in an unambiguous term that the election will be held as per existing constitutional provisions and it really does not matter whether the main opposition alliance takes part in it or not.

She went further by reiterating that there are many more political parties (which may run into a three digit number as per the record of the Election Commission) who are all prepared and eager to take part in the election. In the process, the PM has also implicitly stated who would be the chief adviser (CA) of the next caretaker government (CTG) when her term expires in a few weeks time.

The PM has also broken her silence about the Election Commission (EC) when she has asserted in clear term that the CEC and his colleagues are neutral people and they are doing a great job by preparing a flawless voter list, which, in her words, the opposition political parties are all out there to thwart.

The CEC, emboldened with the clean bill from the chief executive of the republic, has once again come out from his self-styled seclusion with his usual verbal jab towards his critics and echoed the views of the government leaders that the country is not in the course of any serious crisis as most political analysts and civil society groups are apprehending.

The PM is repeatedly avouching her adherence to the constitutional provision as if the opposition political parties are conspiring for an unconstitutional means to usurp the helm of the state. Constitution is

not a divine document. Bangladesh constitution, for instance, has been amended fourteen times. In many cases, it was done to serve petty party interest, rather than the national ones.

The most recent and brazen example was the 14th amendment, which was enacted by the alliance government apparently enabling a person of its choice to become the CA of the next caretaker government. The arguments of BNP in support of the amendment are not plausible and the people in general are not that blockish not to understand the BNP's hidden agenda in pushing through the redundant reform of the constitution.

In my conversations with late Mr. Enayetullah Khan, by no means a friend of AL, in his last days in Toronto, I won over him vis-a-vis any noble motive of the government in instituting the 14th amendment. Enayetullah Khan, at that time, wrote a strong piece in the

New Age, urging Justice K M Hasan to relinquish himself from the responsibility of the future CA of the next CTG.

If the PM and her party people believe that any constitutional amendment is beyond any criticism and reformation, she then loses the moral right to criticize the fourth amendment of the constitution which was duly piloted through the parliament with more than 99 per cent support of its members.

Numerous articles have come out in the print media asking Justice Hasan to disavow himself from the plan of the alliance government. The nation is yet to hear any sort of words from him that would give us a breathing space. In fact, the provision of the CTG in the constitution has envisaged such a scenario, whereby any probable individual could exercise his right to withdraw himself, and has provided multiple options to the head of state to choose the CA.

The inner spirit of the CTG is the impartiality in making a level playing field for all the political parties in the general election. Even the recent past (we cannot read the future) of K M Hasan as a justice of our highest court regrettably failed to assert his commitment to live up to the spirit of neutrality. Justice Hasan has so far maintained a total silence on the issue, which in one

way enhanced the dignity of the latest office he held, but in no way cultivated the much needed trust for the extremely daunting tasks that lie ahead to create a label ground.

This is more so for the fact that the alliance government, through its unprecedented politicization, will be leaving behind an administration where it would be difficult to find enough non-partisan and competent people who could be trusted to be a part of the fair and impartial electoral process. In addition, the whole of the EC must be striped out of its current occupants and a credible voter list must be created, an indispensable prerequisite to hold a free and fair election.

Next comes the EC, whose abhorrent activities led by its more so obdurate chief has transformed it into a shambles. Its occupants are not only partisans, it is more loathsome for the fact that they lack "the same sense of Honour as the rest of us."

In fact, in a span of a year or so, the CEC has probably elevated himself to make it to the Guinness book of records for becoming the subject of so many cartoons for his endless ludicrous comments and acts that defied the law and court orders.

Even on Thursday when the

thousands of opposition activities, demanding his resignation, were mercilessly beaten up by the police, the CEC's jovial mood and insensate comments reminded one of the famous Nero playing the flute while Rome was burning.

Except for the cronies of the BNP chief, any citizen of the republic holding any semblance of affinity towards democratic principle and fair election wants the CEC and his partners in crime to quit to relieve the nation from ditching into an impending catastrophe. However, any such move is not forthcoming, since the CEC and his partners, with an added bird of the same feather in the flock, seem to be determined to carry out the task outlined in the blue-print of their masters who have carefully chosen them to play their roles in the cryptically orchestrated process.

It seems that the politicians at the helm of state have very short memories. Before the former PM Sheikh Hasina appointed the CEC, M A Sayeed, she wrote to the then leader of the opposition Begum Khaleda Zia, not once, but twice to sit with her to appoint a consensus person. Begum Zia turned down the invitation and instead asked the PM to resign. Following the appointment of M A Sayed, BNP called hartal and created commotion, lead by Moudud Ahmed, at the

oath-taking ceremony.

Confused with the same name, Khaleda even declared: "We cannot take part in an election under a CEC who was a Baksal governor."

She even uttered the most vulgar threat directed towards the most revered CEC (M Abu Hena) this country has ever seen. Mr. Hena was a consensus (his pre-condition before accepting the position) appointment by the CTG under Justice Habibur Rahman.

After losing a by-election in Pabna, the BNP chief issued a blatant intimidation to the CEC by saying: "Quit now, if you have minimum sympathy and love for the country. Or else you have to stand in dock for trial for the losses of lives and property during the movement."

Now she is all out there to defend the CEC and his entourage who have all but annihilated any degree of credibility that the august body had maintained during the ups and downs of our tumultuous journey through the democratic process.

Arrogance of state power and wealth had induced the PM and her party men to forget the party's moment of despair only ten years ago. However, I vividly recollect the grim and humiliated face of Begum Zia (on TV) as opposed to

the beaming face of her rival on the April 30, 1996 when she attended the oath-taking ceremony of the CTG led by Justice Habibur Rahman after the fall of her short-lived government.

Her government lasted for only 26 days. Sure enough, the election was held without the participation of AL as per constitutional provision and under the stewardship of a CEC, also a high court justice of identical incompetence, chosen also by Begum Zia.

Ironically, the MPs of the resulting parliament had to work overtime, not working out their own agenda, but rather on the agenda set out by the party that boycotted the election.

Over the last 35 years, there were only two elections that were held in this land without the participation of the AL. Incidentally, the governments which resulted from those elections and the CECs who conducted those elections met more or less the identical fate. Is the stage once again set for history to repeat itself?

Dr. Mozammel H. Khan is the Convenor of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

## Bugti, the military, and the great game We cannot stay together

**History has a cruel way of making heroes and budding nationalisms need martyrs like Akbar Bugti for sustenance. His killing is significant. It should remind us of the crippling results of military dominance in Pakistan -- dismemberment, violent sectarianism, al-Qaeda and Talibanism -- and warn us of the disastrous consequences for Pakistan if Balochistan is sucked into a new great game to redraw the map of the region.**

NAJAM SETHI

AFTER a lifetime crowded with passion, violence, opportunism, controversy, and arrogance, Akbar Bugti's wish at the ripe old age of 80 to transcend his tribal limitations and personal rivalries and be dubbed a martyr for the cause of Baloch nationalism may well come true.

How did this happen? What are its consequences? Mr Bugti was pro-Pakistan and pro-Jinnah before the Partition. He expected his personal and tribal prospects to flourish in a democratic and federal Pakistan. But General Ayub Khan's martial law and One-Unit scheme in the 1960s was inimical to such a setup.

Resistance, incarceration, alienation and radicalization among the Baloch followed. After the disenfranchisement of the Bengalis led to war and secession, the Baloch papared over tribal rivalries and banded together to demand provincial and local rights in 1972. But Z A Bhutto's Bonapartism sought to snuff them out.

He rewarded Mr Bugti with provincial governorship for splitting with his nationalist Marri-Mengal colleagues. This was a grave error on Mr Bugti's part. He was isolated and condemned thereafter by fellow Baloch. But he didn't have the humility or wisdom to rebuild fences with them. So he became a

loner, isolated from mainstream Baloch politics, dependent upon Islamabad for his political well being.

As chief minister during Benazir Bhutto's time, he earnestly negotiated the Bugti tribe's contracts with Pakistan Petroleum Ltd and the federal government like a good trade union leader. This local role was entrenched over time for two reasons.

The Marris and Mengals combined to share power with Pakhtun elements in Balochistan while Mr Bugti sulked on the sidelines throughout the 1990s. Thus, as the province learnt to be flexible regarding greater autonomy, Mr Bugti was inclined to brawl with governments in Islamabad.

When Islamabad tried to cut him down to size him by propping up his local opponents, he became furious and vindictive. But a combination of new political developments in the post 1999 period made Mr Bugti's isolated and prickly position dangerously untenable.

This is what happened. General Musharraf arrived on the scene with self-serving ideas "to rescue Pakistan from the clutches

of corrupt politicians, feudal lords, and tribal chieftains." His agenda's centre-piece was a local body system in which there was no room for traditional and relatively autonomous power-wielders.

In Punjab and Sindh, this meant a scuttling of the landed and commercial support base of politicians

like Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto; in the NWFP and Balochistan it meant the replacement of the big and rebellious Sardars and Nawabs by smaller tribal and middle-class elements.

This strategy was seemingly clinched by rigging the 2002 elections and ousting Bhutto's PPP from Sindh, Sharif's PMLN from Punjab, ANP nationalists from the NWFP and the Marri-Mengal-Bugti triumvirate from Balochistan.

The Military-Mullah Alliance was reinvented to strengthen the military's domination over the country. Inevitably, however, there was resistance from the ousted players. Ms Bhutto and Mr Sharif were dependent on peaceful street protest to make their voice heard. But the masses were cynical and fatigued. However, the Baloch sardars could recourse to the time-tested path of armed resistance by fiercely loyal tribesmen.

Thus, as Ms Bhutto and Mr Sharif wearily inched toward a feeble Charter of Democracy, the Marris and Mengals set up the Balochistan Liberation Army and tried to nudge Mr Bugti to join forces with them.

In the event, India and Afghanistan jointly sensed an opportunity to exact historical revenge from Pakistan's military establishment by financing and training the BLA. Mr Bugti was now impaled on the horns of a dilemma. He could swallow pride and join the BLA under the leadership of the

Marris or he could fight his own battles with Islamabad.

In the event, he opted to flirt with the BLA in order to extract concessions from Islamabad. But he overplayed his hand. Unlike politicians who relish long-drawn negotiations and are prepared to compromise, military commanders seek swift and outright victory on the basis of their might.

So General Musharraf wrapped up the Chaudhry Shujaat-Mushahid Hussain committee and closed the door on Mr Bugti. This provoked the BLA to recklessly tempt fate by attacking the IG-FC and lob shells at General Musharraf during a tribal gathering in Marri area in December 2005.

The die was cast for irrevocable military action against the BLA and Mr Bugti. The final military action was predicated on the calculation that Balach Marri, the son of Khair Bux Marri and commander of the BLA, and Brahamdag Bugti, the heir apparent of Mr Bugti, would also be eliminated in one fell swoop, thereby decapitating all tribal resistance.

The cruel irony, however, is that the main targets escaped and the frail old man who couldn't even walk was felled by a hail of bullets and bombs from the gallant defenders of Pakistan. History has a cruel way of making heroes and budding nationalisms need martyrs like Akbar Bugti for sustenance.

His killing is significant. It should remind us of the crippling results of military dominance in Pakistan -- dismemberment, violent sectarianism, al-Qaeda and Talibanism -- and warn us of the disastrous consequences for Pakistan if Balochistan is sucked into a new great game to redraw the map of the region.

Najam Sethi is Editor of the Friday Times.

**Avigdor Lieberman** is one of the most controversial figures in Israeli politics. Critics deride the 48-year-old founder of the far-right Israel Beitenu ("Israel is our home") party as a "racist" and a "fascist" for his proposal to redraw Israel's borders to exclude some Israeli Arab villages. But his popularity is also growing among some segments of the population, particularly among fellow Russian immigrants in the Katyusha-ravaged north. A postwar poll in Israel's Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper showed that 18 percent of those questioned thought Lieberman would be the best prime minister, placing him second only to former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu at 22 percent. Lieberman spoke with Newsweek's Kevin Peraino recently at a hotel near Tel Aviv.

**Peraino:** Do you think the war was successful? If not, what went wrong?

**Lieberman:** If you need to ask somebody if you're successful or not, then you failed. After the Six Day War, nobody asked Israel whether we were successful or not successful. Today, if it's not clear enough who is the winner and who is the loser, then you are the loser. I can't say we are losers, but we are not winners. And the very deep internal dispute after this war is a more serious result than even the military result.

**What do you mean by that?**

The society is divided. Politicians must be controversial. But the soldiers who came back from the war, and the parents, and people who never were involved in politics -- you can feel their protests. They're not just the political leadership. It's a bad situation.

**Is it just a problem with the political leadership, or do you think it's something bigger?**

I think it's a crisis of the system -- not only the leadership. It's not only this government. I'm against this government. But you can't say it's only this government. It's four or five governments before, also. In Israel, (the political system) is so unstable. You can't develop any political vision, any strategic vision. Everyday somebody changes in the government. It's impossible to continue in this framework. It's the same in the Army. It's not only political decision-makers' failures. It's the generals' also. Their vision was wrong. They were sure that only with the Air Force it was enough to win the war.

**Do you blame (Israeli military Chief of Staff Dan) Halutz for that?**

No, it's not only personal criticism; it's criticism of our system. **Do you think Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will survive this crisis?**

No. I don't see how (his party) can finish this year. In January 2007,

they will not exist.

**A recent poll showed 18 percent of the public thought you would be the best candidate for prime minister. Do you want the job?**

Of course, I'll try to (win the most votes) in the next election, to be prime minister, or at least Defense minister ... People like winners, not losers. I prefer to be strong. And if I will be strong, the people will like me. But it's not crucial. I have options outside politics also.

**There have been reports that you might be considering joining the Olmert government.**

No, no, no, no. Pure speculation. I tried to explain to Olmert and his people: in this situation, you must keep credibility. You can't be involved in political endeavors, to buy somebody and sell somebody. You must be very open -- everything on the table.

**But they approached you?**

Yeah, in the last two weeks.

**And they said they want you in the government?**

And I said, "You must have a full

reshuffle from the beginning. There's no chance."

**Do you think a military conflict with Iran is inevitable?**

I don't see any other possibilities. We have the experience of the second world war. What's happening today is exactly what (happened) in Europe before the Second World War.

**But how do you propose solving the problem?**

I don't see any reason to discuss the details, how and which way. At the end of the day, I think it will be our problem, and Israel will do everything to survive.

**So are you talking about an Osirak-style Air Force raid?**

I don't know. I'm not a military specialist.

**Political opponents have called you a "fascist" and a "racist."**

This is really a conflict between two civilizations. What is, really, the reason for the long-standing conflict between Jews and Arabs, between Israel and the Palestinians? Every place around the world where you have two nations, two religions, two languages, you have friction, you have conflict. I don't believe in coexistence. We can be neighbors, but we cannot stay together.

(c) 2006, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.

## What to call the enemy

**With the elections just two months away, the White House is turning once again to a strategy that has worked so well in the past: evoke 9/11, raise the specter of al-Qaeda and accuse the Democrats of fatal weakness in the face of the enemy. But 2006 is not 2004, when the administration found it easier to tie bin Laden's loyalists in with the insurgents in Iraq. One of Bush's strengths has been his ability to make the complex seem simple. But the war on terror's many fronts -- British airline plots, Lebanese militias, Iranian nukes, brewing civil war in Iraq -- defy any simple political packaging.**

RICHARD WOLFFE and HOLLY BAILEY

LAST fall White House aides were grappling with a seemingly simple question that had eluded them for years: what should the president, in his many speeches on the war on terror, call the enemy? They were searching for a single clean phrase that could both define the foe and reassure Americans who were confused by a conflict that had grown much bigger than Osama bin Laden. But the answer was anything but simple. Some academics preferred the term

"Islamism," but the aides thought that sounded too much as if America were fighting the entire religion. Another option: jihadism. But to many Muslims, it's a positive word that doesn't necessarily evoke bloodshed. Some preferred the conservative buzzword "Islamofascism," which was catchy and tied neatly into Bush's historical view of the struggle.

But when national-security adviser Steve Hadley called the CIA, the Pentagon and the State Department, the experts nixed the idea of a single phrase for a war that was so complex. "There was a conscious desire not to use just

one definitive word, because there wasn't a perfect word," recalls Michael Gerson, Bush's chief speechwriter at the time (and now a Newsweek contributor). The result was a rhetorical mish-mash. "Some call this evil Islamic radicalism," Bush explained, "others, militant jihadism; still others, Islamofascism. Whatever it's called, this ideology is very different from the religion of Islam."

Five years after 9/11, and more than three years after invading Iraq, President Bush is still searching for the perfect phrase to define the enemy in the war on

terror -- and reassure Americans who will soon head to the polls. Other Republicans -- including Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, who is in a tough reelection race -- have adopted "Islamofascism" as shorthand for terrorists. The term gained currency in the early '90s in reference to radical Muslim clerics, and was popularized after 9/11 by neocons.

Bush has used the term "Islamic fascists" sporadically, most recently to describe the alleged London bomb plotters. But the phrase was noticeably absent from his latest major speech on the war recently -- which was part of a procession of campaign-style addresses by the administration's biggest names. This time he called the bad guys "a worldwide network of radicals that use terror to kill those who stand in the way of their totalitarian ideology." It was hardly the kind of pithy slogan GOP activists could slap on a bumper sticker.

With the elections just two

months away, the White House is turning once again to a strategy that has worked so well in the past: evoke 9/11, raise the specter of al-Qaeda and accuse the Democrats of fatal weakness in the face of the enemy. But 2006 is not 2004, when the administration found it easier to tie bin Laden's loyalists in with the insurgents in Iraq. One of Bush's strengths has been his ability to make the complex seem simple. But the war on terror's many fronts -- British airline plots, Lebanese militias, Iranian nukes, brewing civil war in Iraq -- defy any simple political packaging. (Some foreign-policy analysts question whether Bush may be unwittingly helping the jihadists by lumping together disparate groups, instead of exploiting the differences between Sunnis and Shiites, Arabs and non-Arabs.)

Voters -- including many Republicans -- are openly doubting the president's ability to make the country more secure. Polls show that voters narrowly side

with Republicans on terrorism, but they now prefer Democrats on Iraq. The White House believes the numbers are driven by the continuing bloodshed (the latest Pentagon report shows a 50 percent increase in Iraqi casualties this summer, citing a rise in sectarian violence and a still-powerful Sunni insurgency). For an administration that has built its entire political strategy around simplifying the complexities of national security, the widening war -- and the softening ground at home -- are sources of great frustration. "It can be hard to really explain who we are fighting and what we are up against in a way that isn't confusing," said one senior Bush aide, who declined to be named while speaking about strategy.

The uncertainty over how best to sell the war may help explain recent speeches by the administration's biggest guns -- Dick Cheney, Don Rumsfeld, Condi Rice. The media played them as a concerted effort to put Democrats

on the defensive and win back the trust of disillusioned Republicans. But the speeches also underscored something else: how disjointed the once disciplined administration has become when talking about the war. Cheney, usually the most aggressive member of Team Bush, was notably less strident about the war's critics; his assertion that they suffer from "self-defeating pessimism" was a step back from earlier complaints that they had lost "their memory, or their backbone." Bush described the doubters as "sincere" and "patriotic" -- but wrong. But Rumsfeld apparently didn't get the memo. In one of his more extreme rhetorical forays, the Defense secretary likened critics of the war to the appeasers of Nazi Germany in prewar Europe. Rice, meanwhile, chose an altogether different historical analogy. The fight against terrorists, she suggested, was akin to the long struggle of the cold war.

GOP strategists are working to get their own message under

control, and to unify a disparate party. According to one internal party memo, Bush's position on national security is the best way to motivate Republicans to go to the polls in November. Longtime pollster Fred Steeper, a former adviser to Bush 41, wrote that "large majorities" supported Bush's commitment to defeating terrorists in Iraq and around the world.

Any sign of disarray was out of sight as Bush landed in Utah, one of the reddest states in the Union. A hastily arranged crowd of more than 3,000 supporters gathered to greet him at Salt Lake City airport. Bush bounded off his plane to the soundtrack of the movie "Air Force One" as rock-concert lights spun and twirled in the night sky. "You're the man, George!" screamed one fan. The president might not know what to call the enemy, but he knows where to find his friends.

(c) 2006, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.