

Dhaka, Sunday, April 12, 1992

A Victory for Major

There is seldom a single reason that decides the fate of a national election. This is precisely the case with the British poll in which the ruling Conservative Party has won an unprecedented fourth consecutive term this century.

Indeed, all kinds of reasons have played their part, to varying degrees, in bringing the Tories back to office. The consensus is, the British electorate got over its anger, or at least put it aside for the time being, over the continuing recession, the unpopular poll tax and the high level of unemployment.

To what extent the personality — and the performance — of Prime Minister John Major helped the Tories in winning the race remains debatable. At this moment, the answer to the question should be in the affirmative.

The Prime Minister has rightly described his party's victory as a "magnificent" one, but it is a victory overshadowed by challenges. The lingering recession and the failure of business houses continue to eat into the vitals of the British economy.

In the felicitation offered to Mr Major, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has rightly expressed the hope that months and years to come will see further consolidation of relations between the United Kingdom and Bangladesh.

Death in a Mini

Jamaluddin, 30, went on Monday to the National Zoo at Mirpur to make good use of the Eid holiday. He took a minibus ride on his way back to town.

That he is only one of 23 who died during Eid festivities is far from our thoughts. The point is the very universal abuse of bus passengers by the bus crew. Verbal abuse — debasing, demeaning, degrading, dehumanizingly insulting — is what ceaselessly rules inside the hull where anything between 40 and 80 people are held as if at ransom by a 3-to-4-strong crew including the driver.

The bus conductor has his set of problems. He cannot do his job if he starts respecting the human person not to speak of the human mind. If his activity inside the bus is dehumanizing, that is only because he has been, in the first place, himself dehumanized by the conditions of his job.

Overcrowding and the resulting exit of the ticket system are at the root of all passenger-conductor conflict which in turn accounts for yearlong processions of violences of a variegated nature. We have too little bus space for the traffic we transport, specially in Dhaka.

The Times of London once vaunted Top people read The Times'. Indeed, not many of the minibus riders or their persecutors may not have sighted a copy of the Daily Star — ever so far. The goings on inside a moving mini very closely resemble what goes on in the society at large.

We grieve for Jamal and sympathise for the punching conductors of all the minis and condemn those that have institutionalised bus overcrowding

The Issue at Stake Is the Genocide of '71

THE current campaign against Golan Azam, a Pakistani citizen who was recently re-appointed Ameer of the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), in the wake of the verdict given by a Gono Adalat (People's Court) at Suhrawardy Uddyan on Independence Day, has brought the issue of the genocide of 1971 to the fore of public debate again.

The fact that the issue has proved to be a powerful and emotive mover of public opinion 21 years after the holocaust, has certainly irritated or embarrassed a number of people. Not surprisingly, various attempts are being made to cloud the issue or divert the debate along other, peripheral or wholly irrelevant channels.

To many, if not most people, the revival of the demand to put perpetrators of and accomplices to the genocide has not come as a surprise even 21 years after the event. There are good reasons for it.

It is incumbent on any nation to avenge crimes perpetrated against its people and bring the culprits to justice. The lapse in time is of no relevance here.

The Israelis hung Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem nearly 20 years after the Holocaust; nearly 40 years after World War II ended, the former Soviets extradited from the United States a Ukrainian who had collaborated with the German Army and put him on trial for war crimes; the French brought Klaus Barbie back from Latin America and convicted him of crimes against humanity nearly 45 years after event.

Only last week, a German court decided, after 13 years of investigation, that the man found drowned in Sao Paulo of Brazil in 1979 was indeed Dr. Josef Mengele, the 'Angel of Death' who had carried out gruesome experiments on

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Jews at Auschwitz, the concentration camp where 400,000 Jews, were gassed to death.

However, the German investigator-prosecutor, according to a BBC report, declared that he would have much preferred to have Mengele alive, so that he could have been tried on charges of war crimes. That trial was necessary, the prosecutor said on April 8, 1992, to atone the relatives of those murdered and survivors of the camps.

The fact that Mengele committed his crimes 47 years ago was quite irrelevant. Obviously, any nation with a modicum of self-respect and pride can never allow the wholesale butchery of its people and a premeditated attempt to destroy its culture and freedom to go without seeking redress.

The current campaign is rightly being targeted at the genocide and nothing else. The issue at stake, despite attempts to confuse it, is a clear-cut one which could be addressed through a set of six questions:

• Did the Pakistan army carry out a campaign of genocide against the people of Bangladesh between March 25 and Dec. 16, 1971, resulting in the murder of three million Bengalees and rape of 200,000 Bengalee women? Did the Jamaat-i-Islami and like-minded parties, through the Peace Committees, support, aid and encourage the activities of the Pakistan army during that period?

• Did the Razakar forces carry out repressions, ranging

from killings, rapes and lootings to harassment, against the people of Bangladesh during that period? Did the Jamaat-i-Islami and like-minded parties through the Peace Committees, set up those Razakar forces, provide recruits and encourage and instruct them in their activities during that period?

• Did the Al-Badr draw up and carry out a plan to murder hundreds of Bengalee intellectuals, doctors, engineers and other leading citizens in various parts of Bangladesh including Dhaka, upto Dec. 16, 1971? Was the Al-Badr formed by cadres of the Jamaat-i-Islami and its student front the Islami Chhatra Sangha (ICS), and were its activities directed and controlled by the leadership of the Jamaat and ICS?

These are the questions that form the crux of the issue. Answers to these questions should leave no one in any doubt whether war crimes trials should be constituted against the 1971 leadership of Jamaat including Golan Azam and other collaborators of the Pakistan army or not.

For Israel and countries of Europe which suffered under German Nazi occupation, the question was never whether to put the criminals on trial, but when and how. The Republic of Korea, despite having the best of economic and political relations with its former colonial master Japan, never allowed Tokyo to forget the crimes it committed against the Korean people.

Only after Emperor Akihito formally apologised to the Korean people last year, did Roh Tae Woo agree to become the first Korean president to visit Japan.

To our eternal shame, we have not only allowed the criminals to walk away from justice, we have even allowed them and their fascist ideologies to re-establish themselves on the free soil of Bangladesh.

In Germany, where the National Socialist (Nazi) Workers Party of Adolf Hitler carried out its genocide in the name of the 'supremacy of the Aryan race', the Nazi party was banned forever.

Banned also was politics propagating Aryan racial supremacy and bigotry. People of Germany were never allowed to forget what took place between 1933 and 1945, and who the criminals were.

In Bangladesh, where the genocide was carried out in the name of 'saving Islam', the ban on politics based on religion was withdrawn within five years of liberation.

Insult was rubbed into the collective national wound through the wholesale rehabilitation of those who collaborated with Pakistan's genocidal army. It was called 'reconciliation', but what did it really mean?

It meant that killers and collaborators had to be appeased and treated as 'democrats' and 'patriots' what was officially called 'national unity'.

On the other hand, those hundreds of thousands who

lost near and dear ones, and those millions who suffered for the freedom of this country, saw their sensitivities and rights to justice brusquely shunted aside.

It is now said, or rather whispered from a number of quarters, that individual murder cases should be brought by relatives of martyrs only, and no one else.

Quite clever. That would be one way of denying that a genocide took place in 1971 at all. Shifting the responsibility for seeking justice on individuals would mean only individuals were the aggrieved party.

But no, the whole nation is the aggrieved party. The targets of the killers in 1971 were not individual Bengalees, but the entire nation. The real intention behind the genocide was to de-Bengalify the land, through mass murder, expulsions, destruction of the indigenous culture, followed by colonisation by West Pakistanis with the local communal and fundamentalist forces acting as their agents.

The responsibility to investigate the genocide and prosecute the war criminals lies with the nation, with the state. Individuals will testify, but it is the duty of the state to collect those testimonies and bring charges accordingly.

For 21 years successive governments have failed to carry out its moral duty to restore the dignity of the nation by putting the perpetrators of the genocide on trial, and satisfy the nation's yearning to see justice done.

Attempts by the present

government to sidetrack the real issue may be successful in the short-term, but it will only create grounds for more bitterness in the future. A nation that feels aggrieved and insulted by the failure of its government to discharge its moral responsibilities, cannot be pacified by mere talks of democracy.

It is imperative that the crimes against humanity committed in 1971 are put in their right perspective through verdicts of the courts or war crimes tribunals along Nuremberg lines.

Reopening the files of '71 will not be a case of, as some fear, reopening of old wounds, because this particular national wound has never healed. It was merely covered up, and all emotions related to '71 kept suppressed through an officially-regulated media which down-played all aspects of the genocide for nearly two decades.

As the events of the past two months have conclusively demonstrated, this nation will remain an aggrieved and restless one until all the principal war criminals have been brought to justice.

It may even be necessary, for the sake of justice and dignity of the people of this country, to hold symbolic trials of Pakistani masterminds of the genocide, like Generals Yahya Khan, Hamid Khan, Tikka Khan, Abdullah Niazi, Rao Farman Ali and others, to establish their guilt even if we cannot punish them.

The people of Pakistan should themselves ponder the question. An unqualified acknowledgement of guilt and expression of regret to the people of Bangladesh would not belittle them in the eyes of the world. It would only make them look human.

Accusations Fly as Beirut Limpes Back to Normalcy

Michael Jansen writes from Beirut

COMMUNALISTS everywhere should look on Lebanon and beware. For if ever there is a country with the natural, human and financial resources required for recovery after a devastating sectarian conflict, it is Lebanon.

Lebanon has a central location on the Levant coast, enabling it to benefit from western trade with the Arab hinterland, a rich agricultural sector and a well-developed tourism sector.

Its population is educated, industrious and highly motivated. The country retains foreign currency and gold reserves amounting to \$3 billion and has a relatively modest foreign debt of about \$5 million.

Deposits in Beirut's 80 commercial banks are some \$3 billion and there is another estimated \$2 billion in the external banking sector which developed during the civil war. The industrial sector, based on small-scale workshops, has resumed exports, as has the agricultural sector.

Prosperity should be right around the corner, but it is not. In October 1990, when the Syrian and Lebanese armies drove the rebel Maronite Christian General Michel Aoun from the presidential palace, most Lebanese believed the obstacle to reconciliation, reform and reconstruction had been removed.

The new government, headed by President Elias Hrawi, could get on with implementing the plan adopted a year earlier at Taif in Saudi Arabia.

The government achieved success with its pacification programme in 1991. The rebuilt Lebanese army, backed by Syria's 40,000 troops, brought civil order and security to most of the country which was put under the authority of the Beirut government.

Six out of the eight main militias and the Palestinian guerrillas handed over their weapons to the army and withdrew their fighters from the streets.

Only the pro-Iranian Hezbollah and Israel's surro-

The end of the 16-year civil war has not brought the promised peace to Lebanon. Most of militia have been disarmed and the army, backed by Syria's 40,000 troops, has brought civil order. An ambitious reconstruction programme is underway and elections are scheduled this year. Yet, reports Gemini News Service, President Elias Hrawi has a long way to go before normalcy returns to his war-ravaged country.



- 1975 Civil war begins. Syria supports PLO against Israeli-backed Christians. 1982 Israel invades, expelling PLO. 1985 Israeli army withdraws. 10km 'Security Zone' created patrolled by South Lebanon Army. 1988 Pro-Israeli Maronite General Michel Aoun assumes presidency. 1989 Syrian-backed Maronite Christian Elias Hrawi elected president. 1990 Syrian troops topple Aoun. 1991 Civil war ends, reconstruction begins.

gate 'South Lebanon army' remain heavily armed and deployed along their traditional confrontation line in the south.

The streets of the capital are safer than those of New York. The car bomb, used often during the 16 years of civil war, was last used in December 1991. But the present peace may not last.

In September Syria is due to withdraw its troops to the mountains east of the capital in the first stage of their redeployment to the Bekka valley. Once the Syrian troops leave many Lebanese fear that the militiamen, who have merely hung up their uniforms and

stored their personal weapons in their cupboards, will resume fighting.

This is because many militiamen in the 18 per cent Maronite minority of East Beirut refuse to accept defeat and remain convinced that they can regain their former privileged position in the state structure.

Militiamen-in-waiting are eager to flock to the banner of their self-proclaimed messiah, General Aoun, who continues to speak to his followers from his exile in France on cassette tapes widely circulated in the Maronite area.

Another cause of conflict could be the parliamentary

elections, the first in 20 years, scheduled this year. The government has not fixed a date.

Maronites do not want the poll to be held before the Syrian withdrawal on the ground that the Syrian presence could intimidate voters while other communities fear that the militia would reassert themselves and use their muscle in the absence of the Syrians.

The inability to set a date for the election has further eroded the credibility of the government which has been criticised for its poor performance in rebuilding the country's war-shattered infrastructure and its mismanagement of the economy.

At the end of February, the government scrapped its budget, raised public sector salaries by 60 per cent and increased the price of bread, the staple food by 50 per cent. The cost of food and medicines shot up. In a vote of no confidence the Central Bank refused to back the Lebanese lira which flattered then fell by 25 per cent, to nearly 1,200 to the dollar.

This confirmed the loss of popular confidence in the Hrawi government and undermined the position of Damascus, which supports Hrawi. The general complaint is that the government is both inefficient and corrupt 'beyond the limits' generally acceptable to the traditionally tolerant Lebanese.

Critics charge that there has been little reconstruction of the infrastructure because, as a doctor put it, 'We're bust.'

Lebanon needs \$200 million to repair the electrical distribution system but Beirut's coffers are empty. Thus Beirut gets six to eight hours of electricity a day instead of the 18 hours promised 18 months ago.

Saudi Arabia granted \$60 million to restore street lighting and repair the roads but most of that, say the critics, went into the pockets of contractors.

The city remains blacked out at night and the streets are more potholed than ever before. 'We were better off during the fighting,' snapped a bookseller.

The old commercial centre, destroyed early in the civil war, continues as a wasteland where squatters shelter in burnt out and blasted buildings and soldiers patrol, the former dividing Green Line.

The Council for Redevelopment and Reconstruction cannot secure the endorsement of parliament for an ambitious restoration plan because former tenants and owners of property there refuse to accept central control.

Although corruption and mismanagement discourage potential donors, political considerations have held up funds promised but not paid.

The United States is blamed for blocking a \$700 million World Bank package, about half the sum estimated to be the cost of repairing the

infrastructure. The reason for this is said to be Beirut's refusal to curb the pro-Iranian Hezbollah which reasserted itself in the UN-controlled area north of Israel's occupation zone in the south.

Aid totalling \$160 million from the European Community and \$360 million from Germany is being held up by Bonn because a Shia clan, Affiliated with Hezbollah, has refused to release two German hostages unless two members of this clan, imprisoned in Germany for terrorist offences, are freed.

While the infrastructure crumbles and confidence in the government collapses, the private sector is booming. At Beirut port 12-15 ships a day unload consumer goods and another 15-20 wait to dock.

Private fortunes earned by Lebanese abroad—particularly Shias settled in Africa—flow into real estate and banks. Multi-storied apartment blocks rise above the broken streets of the capital and grand villas in the mountains while the poor cannot afford flats in modest buildings which stand empty. Boutiques selling latest Paris fashions, luxury food markets and restaurants proliferate.

The 200,000 Lebanese who returned last summer to visit and prospect for their return cast a vote of no confidence by using their return tickets to regain their places of exile. For Lebanon peace and prosperity are not just round the corner.

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OPINION

Workmanship

Shahabuddin Mahtab

From time to time, we are having news reports that Tk. ten lac worth of Saris have been seized. At other times, we find that foreign cigarettes worth several lac of takas have been discovered. Furthermore, our shops are filled up with Bhutanese jams and fruit juice, Chinese pins, inks, toothpaste, pens and toothbrushes, American peanuts, Pakistani jams, jellies and cornflakes, Thai shoes etc etc. This list can, however, be lengthened ad infinitum. We have now come to a stage, where we produce little and depend mostly on doles, largesse, FWP etc all, 'which are not much better than beggary'.

But this should not have been the case. All that was needed, was a little patriotism, hard work, and excellence of workmanship. The nation cannot survive with an 'indent culture'. We produce or we perish. We have a resilient workforce, which can carry us very far, provided the Government policy is one of production and of 'Dal Bhat', for the welfare of three fourths of our population. Our weavers and the mills can meet most of our clothing needs, and supply us with good quality saris and

lunGIS, if the government policies say so, through its commercial, industrial and banking policies, tariff policy, and law and order policy. A genuine and transparent government policy can lead us to multiple production of both high quality cloths and the low priced ones. Our workforce are quite capable to meet our sophisticated needs also. If this was possible three hundred years ago, it is also possible now. Heroic harmonious understanding between the private enterprise and labour, and also the government is a prime need. We can improve the quality of our peanuts, cashewnuts, pineapples and mangoes, and these then can face international competition. There can also be a chain of preserved food industries. The well processed leather and footwear industries can find an extended external market, if we can excel in workmanship and craftsmanship.

Let not the worker's hand be reduced to that of a beggar's and there be more beggars. Let our industrial policy be in terms of 'nurse the baby, protect the child and free and adult.'

To the Editor...

Controversies in cricket

Sir, Bangladesh Television's live coverage of a number of matches of the 5th World Cup Cricket helped resurrect the cricket — spirit in Bangladesh demoralized by India's West Bengal team in Dhaka recently.

Everything unexpected happened in this super world tournament that produced more shocking upsets than pleasant surprises and made a champion out of an unfavourite team. The best outcome of this battle-of-the-best was visible popularity of the game increased by extra enthusiasm for the new entrant South Africa after over two decades.

Some of the disappointments to the cricketers came

from the regulations governing the matches particularly relating to setting new target in the innings interrupted by unsuitable weather or situation. In the league system, the necessity of a super league on knockout basis must have crossed someone's imagination, except for a tie between the table-toppers.

LBW and Wide will need precise definitions to satisfy controversies over their accuracy. Umpires' decisions at times found to be doubtful on the video generated arguments at least. Probably the most debatable topic in this prestigious confrontation was the unrealistic adjustment of a match affected by a condition beyond control compelling one

team to pay the price. Just to do away with all anomalies for a gratified result of a match and also the tournament altogether, possible fresh play, if disagreed to sharing matchpoints, may be a meaningful settlement of an incomplete or disputed encounter in such a standard competition.

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BTB

Sir, The Bangladesh Television has produced and telecast a number of entertaining programmes on the eve of the holy Eid-ul-Fitr. Thanks to BTB authority. Like many others I enjoyed viewing 'Itady' and re-running of the

VIPs 'Aboshor'. Meanwhile, I would like to request the Shamajik Upadeshta (Social Advisor) of Itady to kindly offer his valuable advice to the huge number of BTV's untouched, uncalled etc. etc. enlisted artists on how to please the BTV bosses for getting a programme. Before the Eid, the files in the Govt. Offices moved very quickly. Itady reported. How about the BTV? Did BTV use their own recorders to record Eid programmes or asked their 'enlisted' artists to get their performance videotaped by themselves on priority (?) basis?

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