

A New Beginning

The emergence of Awami League which led the nation in the Liberation War against the Pakistanis as the majority party in parliament is a historic event. After long 21 years the AL is about to form the government again. The popular mandate it has received to rule the country is a clear verdict in favour of continuation of a democratic process. All those who participated — either directly or indirectly — in the process deserve due credit. Now that the elected members of parliament have started taking oath, the real test of governance lies ahead of them.

So far, Sheikh Hasina, who is to take the job of the premier, has given very encouraging indications of things to expect. Her recent statements — from seeking co-operation from all parties in forming and running government to declaring that her government would be of the people and not of the AL — have greatly raised our expectations. Indeed, she is conducting herself with a high degree of responsibility and propriety.*

No denying that Hasina's ascent and the AL's return to power have generated tremendous expectations in the public mind. Raising the level of expectations and saying all good things can be easy but fulfilling all those may not be so. It is simply because of this that we feel compelled to sound a note of caution. The new prime minister will have detractors waiting in the wings to find fault with her. Every step she takes will be under severe public scrutiny. So she should be particularly careful about steps to right the wrongs her party strongly feels it has suffered during the 21 years out of power. Going overboard is not good for anyone, least of all when a party is bent on delivering the goods by bringing in a synthesis between its historic role and its response to changing circumstances.

That the party had to remain out of power for such a long period provides a lesson, which is that some of the party programmes or activities were not endorsed by the people. Now the AL has a chance to correct all that and usher in a new era of democratic rule. It is not unlikely that its activists down the line might be tempted to overdo in their euphoria of success without the knowledge of the party hierarchy. This will mar the image of the party and more importantly run contrary to the party leadership's vision of good governance. So, rein in the party activists, and keep strict watch and control over those elements who may give the party a bad name. Now is the time for self-discipline.

Budgetary Instruments

A provisional budget for 1996-97 has been announced by the caretaker government as a matter of constitutionally enshrined — and, therefore, elevated — technical necessity. A presidential authorisation of expenditure not exceeding 25 per cent of the estimates comes through an ordinance which is subject to approval by parliament within 30 days of its constitution. It gives a forward cover to an uninterrupted functioning of the government involving, *inter alia*, payment of salaries to government employees from July 1.

The constitutional continuity and legality of financial management have been provided for on a comprehensive basis: the supplementary budget for the outgoing fiscal 1995-96 has been dovetailed by another presidential ordinance which is also to be ratified by the new parliament. The provisional ADP for 1996-97 completes the cycle of budgetary instruments the caretaker government is leaving behind as a useful framework of references for the newly-elected government.

The caretaker government's éclat on the economic side has been a certain professional vision coupled with an appropriate understanding of its over-all given role. For instance, while the provisional nature of the revenue budget is depicted by the fact of all the estimates having been made on the basis of existing duties and taxes, the caretaker government's projections about surplus generation to the tune of Tk 5,017 crore emphasise four points: better revenue collection, controlled public expenditure, improved public sector performance, and a resulting bigger contribution of domestic resource to the ADP. The revenue surplus shown in the revised budget for the outgoing year stood at Tk 3,698 crore.

Notably, the highly useful Food-for-Works Programme which had fallen on evil days is being given a shot in the arm by an allocation of Tk 60 crore over the expenditure incurred in the revised budget for 1995-96.

The CTBT Row

India has made clear that she would not sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in its present form. She perceives that banning of nuclear tests is discriminatory without the five atomic power states being dispossessed of their arsenals. This is, in fact, a reiteration of her well-known position on the subject. What, however, creates a furore at the present moment and thereby brings the issue to the fore, is the fast approaching deadline of June 28 for signing the treaty in Geneva. Pakistan in a positioning statement has lately said she cannot sign the treaty either when India has refused to do so.

We being in favour of complete and total disarmament see the point that a ban on further tests cannot by itself render the world free from threats of a holocaust when a nuclear club reserves the right to possess all the weapons of mass destruction. The countries in the nuclear threshold — India, Pakistan and Israel — seem keen on keeping their nuclear options open in view of their oft-repeated security concerns. In other words, the incipient dangers of a nuclear annihilation do multiply.

Significantly, the developing countries' arms expenditure as a proportion of their national income is higher than that being incurred in the developed world. Two lessons are imparted by this ironic situation. Firstly, the intra-regional rivalries need scaling down to yield money for the social sectors in the poverty-ridden countries; and second, the big nuclear power states must themselves settle for the zero-option and set the right tenor for the rest of the world.

BJP's Victory in Secular India and Jamaat's Debacle in Non-secular Bangladesh

by Sultana Nahar

The rise of communal forces can be contained by conscious secular people... Bangladesh has already set an example in this direction.

PEOPLE of Bangladesh have unceremoniously ditched Jamaat on June 12, 1996. Those who believe in secular civil society have valid reasons to be happy at the sudden debacle of Jamaat in non-secular Bangladesh in an election hailed by the foreign observers and the press as free and fair. Thus Jamaat was eliminated through a transparent democratic process. Some political parties and some ultra-secular nationalist forces tried in the past to obliterate this fundamentalist party from political scene of Bangladesh by using force and other undemocratic means. Democracy has rightly played its assigned role. Unfortunately, vested quarters never allowed democracy to take root and to gain strength to support, and sustain political process and good governance.

Many members of Jamaat-e-Islam opposed our War of Liberation in 1971 and some of them took part in killing our people, particularly our intellectuals. When Bangladesh was liberated, many demanded their execution. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman chose to pardon them. He believed in the politics of cohesion instead of attrition. He thus avoided a second-front of conflict and concentrated in re-building the war-ravaged country. It was General Zia who revived Jamaat as a political party after being saddled with state power through a series of military coups and counter coups. In a democratic country, multi-party system of politics is an accepted norm. A particular party may be based on, and guided by religious motives. Jamaat in Bangladesh and BJP in India are religio-political

parties. These are definitely fundamentalist parties and they exploit the religious sentiment of the electorate to gain political advantage. It is all fine and legal as long as these parties are recognised by the laws of the land. Whether its politics and policies are detrimental to the interest of the nation — it should be left to the people to decide — and that is the underlying essence of democracy.

Jamaat was never allowed in the past to function freely as a party. A section of people and some parties in power then opposed tooth and nail its functioning and yet they did not hesitate to use Jamaat to go to power. During the short period of the caretaker government of Justice Habibur Rahman Jamaat enjoyed all facilities and encountered no hindrance. It is often heard and alleged that Jamaat activists cut the veins of people and hardly any case was reported to a police station and prosecution initiated in a court of law. It was democratic and logical to take the Golam Azam issue to the court and the court gave its verdict on his citizenship in accordance with law. Democratic ways and rule of law should be resorted to in solving such political disputes instead of taking law in someone's or some group's hand.

If some member of this party are to be punished for their crime during the War of Liberation, democratic means and due process of law should

be invoked for the purpose. Chasing a procession of Jamaat down the lane, debarring it from holding political meeting through unfair and undemocratic means and staging a trial in People's Court are definitely not democratic practices. However cogent and forceful argument they might have, people who formed the People's Court to try Golam Azam did dis-service to democracy.

In the recent time, Jamaat had gone to people with their policies and programmes. They set candidates in all the 300 constituencies for the first time. Their election manifesto was widely publicised to the people and the press. Workers of Jamaat including women campaigned from door to door. The wishes of people were reflected in the verdict they gave in the election of June 12, 1996. Thus the debacle of Jamaat took place in a peaceful and democratic manner. The sudden downfall was brought about through non-violence and not through other means which some quarters tried in the past. It is a victory of democracy that Jamaat's political clout has weakened and its popularity has reached the lowest ebb. Likewise BNP and other parties which gave covert support to fundamentalism will also meet the similar fate if democracy and popular will are allowed to play its due role. The secular provision should be restored to our Constitution to show respect to the sentiment of the public as

reflected in the recent election and particularly to allay wounds of the minorities. People have already given a clear verdict through a democratic process for a secular structure of our Constitution. After all, people are the source of all power and their wishes should be the guiding principles of democracy. Constitution and governance of our country.

In the last parliamentary elections in secular India, BJP stunned the political pundits by emerging as the single largest party in the parliament. For a period of 13 days BJP also formed the government. But the intrigues of the so-called secular Congress and other progressive parties led to the downfall of BJP government. People of Bangladesh were shocked at the overwhelming electoral victory of BJP and later on some people celebrated the fall of the Vajpayee government. It is not understandable what prompted them to such impromptu celebration — definitely not in the finest tradition of democracy. However, if the intention of BJP government was to make lives of the Muslim minorities miserable, people had reason to be alarmed. I personally believe that there would have been less communal violence in India if BJP government was allowed to continue. There is a saying: 'When one trusts a dacoit with his property — the dacoit behaves like a faithful custodian.'

We have seen enough du-

plicity of the secular Congress. From 1965 to 1996, it is learnt that Congress instigated most of the communal riots in India. It is to be kept in mind that BJP in India won the majority seats in parliament through an undiluted democratic process. Conversely, Jamaat was defeated in Bangladesh through a democratic process. BJP has not been reported to have used any black money or any coercive measure to force people to vote for them; then why did the Congress and other right-wing and left-wing parties in India vow to pull down the Vajpayee government? Any democratic minded person should welcome BJP's victory at least for the sake of showing respect to democracy. BJP did not exercise deceit or double standard of the Congress to woo the voters. They focused their election manifesto to the people and canvassed their programme candidly. Knowing fully well that BJP is a fundamentalist party, people elected them as the single largest party. The verdict was spontaneous, as such all other political parties should have allowed BJP to govern the country. Bringing down an elected government through political manipulation, snatches of decadence of moral values. The progressive parties of India seem to be devoid of such values and political courtesy. We can rightly conclude that the secular parties of India are secular in name only. Their long practice of secularism has

strengthened the fundamentalist parties so much as they could convince people about their principles and integrity and ultimately were in a position to form the government.

If the people of India want Hindu Raj, they have democratic right to demand it. Unless people want a secular government, secular provision of the Constitution is of no use. It is not the failure of the secular Constitution of India, it is the failure of the Congress party and Congress government. It is reported that Muslims in some provinces voted for BJP and a Muslim minister was inducted in the shortlived government of Vajpayee. It is interesting to note that BJP won only two parliamentary seats in the election they took part for the first time. Over the passage of time the duplicity and hypocrisy of the Congress helped BJP to gain popular support. In West Bengal BJP could not win a parliamentary seat. The credit goes to Jyoti Basu and secular people of West Bengal. While failure of Congress gave victory to BJP in other provinces. Thus Congress is singularly responsible for rapid rise of fundamentalist parties in India and in the process Congress itself was routed in the last parliamentary election. Congress in India and BNP in Bangladesh, in my opinion, are more communal than BJP and Jamaat respectively. The rise of communal forces can be contained by conscious secular people of both the countries through democratic means. Bangladesh has already set an example in this direction. Therefore, let the democratic process operate undisturbed.

Picking up the Thread from Where ZA Bhutto had Left it off

The Shimla Conference has said that the heads of both governments will meet to discuss "a final settlement on Jammu and Kashmir." There can be many permutations and combinations. And both sides will need patience to arrive at something acceptable to both.

cannot be hastened. If a taut string is stretched beyond a point, it will snap.

Pakistan has done well to take the initiative. Benazir Bhutto deserves congratulations for her courage. In any case, the country had boxed itself up in a situation that was intractable. Kashmir is understandably important but the insistence on discussing it first or discussing nothing else except Kashmir were such conditions as New Delhi could not have accepted. It was prepared to discuss Kashmir but it could not be the sole subject on the agenda. Islamabad's realisation, at least that is what it looked like, to drop pre-conditions is a welcome development.

Pakistan's friends in the West were not too happy over the impasse it had itself created. America has been worried over the nuclear option both countries have and its nudging may have worked. My information is that Islamabad was looking for the right opportunity to break the deadlock. If it is so, Pakistan could not have chosen a better time because the Deva Gowda government, with I K Gujral as foreign minister, is committed to a liberal approach. I have no doubt that New Delhi will take some steps unilaterally to indicate goodwill as the talks proceed.

The unfortunate part is that some of the signals Pakistan has sent do not tally with the warmth and faith that Benazir Bhutto's letter exuded. Pakistan foreign minister's approach to Sri Lanka to intervene on Kashmir goes against the spirit of Benazir Bhutto's letter, which sug-

gested a bilateral approach. Understandably, Colombo said no.

When Islamabad has come around to accept bilateral talks as suggested in the Shimla Conference agreement, then why should it try to involve a third party? By this time, it should have realised that the solution to the Kashmir problem does not lie with the world chancery, but with India and Pakistan.

Again, the reported de-

sponse to Pakistan's deployment of M-11.

Islamabad's raise of 14 per cent in defence expenditure in new budget is bound to raise doubts in New Delhi's mind when its defence outlay in real terms has gone down in last few years. Therefore, why not begin talks with the reduction of armed forces? General Zia suggested more than once to effect a proportionate cut in defence expenditure and the defence personnel.

What we have to keep in mind is the remark that Jawaharlal Nehru made to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto nearly 35 years ago in London. Nehru said, 'I know that we must find a solution for Kashmir. But we have got caught in a situation which we cannot get out of without causing damage to the systems and structures of our respective societies.'

Probably, the Shimla Conference was the best time to clinch the issue. Some say, particularly Mrs Gandhi's secretary, P. N. Haksar, that Z A Bhutto had agreed to make the ceasefire line in Kashmir a permanent boundary between India and Pakistan. There is no written proof except India's assertion matched by Pakistan's denial. Now there is a third party, people of Jammu and Kashmir, who will need to be consulted at some stage.

Perhaps the two countries should begin their talks with a set of principles which D P Dhar, then India's petroleum minister, and Aziz Ahmed, then Pakistan's foreign minister, accepted at Murree, nearly one month before the Shimla Conference.

The principles are: 1. Need to normalise relations; 2. Willingness to think afresh, casting aside the shackles of past policies; 3. Recognition of the underlying desire of peoples in both countries for peace and harmony in the subcontinent; 4. Need for establishment of durable peace; 5. Need for ending military conflict, and starting a new chapter of good neighbours; 6. Desirability of diverting resources towards development; 7. Necessity that the summit should not fail; 8. Cooperation in other fields; 9. Desirability of adequate travel facilities to both sides; and 10. Cessation of hostile propaganda.

The reduction of forces can be discussed along with the redeployment of forces at Siachen Glacier, which is of no strategic value as many Indian military experts have said again and again. Such discussions may lead to the proposal of a no-war pact. With both the countries living in the fear of a nuclear holocaust, people in the subcontinent will have a sigh of relief, if there is a no-war pact.

Whether it is considered a dispute or a pending problem, Kashmir should be discussed at some stage. The Shimla Conference has said that the heads of both governments will

meet to discuss "a final settlement on Jammu and Kashmir. There can be many permutations and combinations. And both sides will need patience to arrive at something acceptable to both.

OPINION

Top on the Agenda

AKMA Quader

There has been a qualitative change in the behavioral pattern and value judgment of our people. This was evident in their refusal to participate in the February 15 elections and their outright rejection of the same. The climax was reached when the Parliament of February 15 election failed to sit after the morning of March 26 to pass and adopt the nineteen-or-so odd bills and ordinances including one very important one which made the February 15 polls legally possible, that is, the ordinance which enabled to by-pass the necessity of identity card for the voters to cast votes.

The overwhelmingly large-scale participation of the people in the just-concluded election of June 12 has once again demonstrated that the people are serious about their rights and obligations, and they cannot be ignored. They have asserted their rights and given their verdict. The change in our people has taken place slowly but it has come with a sense of direction and purpose. They deserve a 'thank you' for their maturity and patience.

The people of Bangladesh want to live in peace and carry on freely with their normal day-to-day activities. If our people are able to carry on their normal life, the society will definitely move forward. The economy shall gain momentum, the campuses shall regain their stature as centres for learning, and the desired progress and prosperity shall be achieved. We firmly believe, the new government shall fulfil the people's desire to live in peace. Let us hope for the best.

The task of restoring peace in every sphere of our society is definitely tough but achievable. The writer is Professor of Chemical Engineering, BUET.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Save them

Sir, We human beings have no end to our greed and desires! We creep more and more to what we earn and possess. Sometimes even three square meals are not enough! And never are we grateful. Have the privileged or the physically fit ever realised the conditions of the unfortunate? Have any one sincerely cared to feel about how the crippled are going through? We talk about woman's lib, freedom of press, civic rights, democracy and what not. Has any one come forward to mitigate the sufferings of the destitute invalids by setting up homes/centres and providing three proper meals a day? I am not sure, otherwise, they would not have been seen begging all over.

The other day, after I had finished offering the Zohra prayers at the Baitul Mukarram Mosque, I walked up to buy some books from the Stadium arcade. I then suddenly came across a young half-crippled girl about 12 to 13 years of age. I noticed a sense of consciousness in her. The helpless child was fair, affectionate with good features. Her one piece of pink

est. dedicated and intelligent netri or neta is required.

I mention here that Sheikh Mujib is very much in the heart of all Bangladeshis. When Sheikh Shahab was tied up with a heavy title of Bangabandhu, the dearest Sheikh Mujib slowly slipped out and one day Bangabandhu was found dead in a pool of blood in the staircase of Bangabandhu Bhaban. It was not the death of Sheikh Mujib who remains ever alive in the heart of all of us.

I request the leaders to be careful of the flatterers. Please try to be true to your name. Never allow putting unnecessary title to your name to identify your leadership. Your own name is quite heavy enough to belittle if you can prove yourself to be a good leader. Why do you need a superficial title at all anyway?

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New government

Sir, This has reference of A M Muhith's article "A Menu for Action: Expectations from the New Govt" published in your esteemed daily on the 12th and 13th June. He has elaborately discussed his past experiences in view of implementing his packages of elements by the new government. Thereto I like add the following:

(1) Infrastructure like roads, transport, telephone and electricity, etc should be given top

priority as these are profitable sectors.

2) Top priority should also be given to minimise losses by corporations and banks etc may be made profitable through denationalisation.

3) Attendance and discipline in Secretariat should be tightened unlike the time of former government who apparently failed to ensure it.

M Ali
Khilgaon, Dhaka

Nazrul: Our inspiration

Sir, The nation has celebrated the 97th birth anniversary of the National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam on Jaistha 11, 1403 (BS). On this occasion I would like to appreciate the great poet's concern to build up a exploitation-free land. His poems and other creations tremendously inspired the people of this subcontinent to get rid of the shackles of foreign domination during the British colonial regime.

Our nation should take lesson as well as inspiration from the life and works of the Rebel Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam for establishing true democracy, peace and stability in Bangladesh.

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