

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 eclect 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 3698 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.

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 but 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 the citizenship in accordance with law. Democratic ways and rule of law should be resorted to in solving such political dispute 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-

plcity 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, 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 smacks 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 short-lived 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 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.

I hope there is no last minute hitch. Our foreign secretary Salman Haider and the Pakistan High Commissioner in New Delhi have discussed convenient dates for the meeting of the two foreign secretaries in the later half of July. But Pakistan foreign minister Asef Ahmed Ali has proposed talks at political level. When in Colombo the other day, he called India's ambassador Dayal and told him so. This, of course, upsets the calculations of New Delhi, which wants its foreign secretary to test the water first.

Even otherwise, raising the talks straight to the level of minister is fraught with dangers. Both countries have had no serious dialogues for past several years. Officials, foreign secretaries and even prime ministers of the two sides have met more than once. But the exchange of views were confined either to peripheral subjects or to a discussion they would one day hold to restore normal relations.

Suppose the ministerial-level talks do not take off, then where will we go? The summit — it will be too soon. Officials are good at skirting a subject for weeks. And even when they come to grips with a problem, their grip is so loose that it does not clasp anything, much less the substance. They are the best to prepare the ground, particularly when it has stayed fallow for a long time.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's letter and Prime Minister Deve Gowda's response have broken the ice. It will take time for the situation to thaw. A slow and steady progress will be more dependable and profitable. To span the gap that has yawned over the years at one go is to shut eyes to the realities. However politically attractive, the pace

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 of 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 Deve 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 chancelleries, 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 about 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.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

ployment of the nuclear-capable Chinese M-11 missiles by Pakistan does not go well with Benazir Bhutto's words in the letter: "As responsible leaders of South Asia, let us seize the opportunity to open a new chapter in our relations by laying the foundation of a peaceful South Asia, based on equitable conflict-resolution and reconciliation." The missiles have added to tension and distrust.

Pakistan cannot ride two horses at the same time. There will be a question mark against its offer for talks if it is mounting weapons to threaten India. The pressure on the Deve Gowda government to deploy the Agni missile may not be easy to ward off. Already the Bhartiya Janata Party, which believes in nuclear option, has criticised the government for what it interprets as a pusillanimous re-

There were no takers when he repeatedly made the suggestion. I recall talking to Mrs Gandhi's ministers after an interview with General Zia. But they poo-pooed the idea on the ground that he was not serious. I vainly requested them to call his bluff.

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 has to 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. But, in the meanwhile, discussions or even agreements on other issues can take place.

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 this issue. Some say, particularly Mr 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.

New Delhi should, however, realise that the situation is not as favourable to it as it was when the Shimla Conference was held. At that time India had 90,000 prisoners of war and a large tract of Pakistan territory won during the

Bangladesh war. Then there was the Soviet Union on our side. The situation is different now. America is more on Islamabad's side than ours. And the Soviet Union does not exist anymore.

This does not mean that India has to compromise with the demands on its integrity. All it means is that it is willing to pick up the thread from where Z A Bhutto had left it off at Shimla. And he had indicated that he was willing to go very far. For example, he straightaway agreed to respect "the line of control resulting from the ceasefire of 17 December 1971."

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 agreed fields; 9. Desirability of adequate travel facilities to both sides; and 10. Cessation of hostile propaganda.

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 sensible 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 on June 12 have struck a deal with the winning political party as well as with others who asked for their mandate. The deal is crystal clear. It is top on the agenda for all of us: we want peace in the country. Therefore, the party which has come up as majority in the polls shall have to oblige its citizens by implementing the deal. The people have apparently entrusted the Awami League to in this challenge of establishing peace in the country.

The task of restoring peace in every sphere of our society is definitely tough but achiev-

able. Take lessons from the achievements of the present caretaker government headed by Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman and the Election Commission headed by Mohammad Abu Hena. They proved that good things are possible and can be delivered. The people look forward to good things eagerly and they appreciate them. We thank you Justice Habibur Rahman and Abu Hena for their service to this nation.

Road to peace demands the following:

1. Restore the governance of the government.
2. Enforce law and order ruthlessly. Criminals and law breakers have no colour, creed and identity. They deserve no sympathy and no consideration.
3. Deal with the extortionist with iron hand. Let none protect them.
4. Eradicate corruption, favoritism and nepotism.
5. Establish and ensure the rule of law in all spheres of life without fear or favour.
6. Take lessons from history.

The people of Bangladesh want to can 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 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 crippled? Have any one sincerely cared to feel about how the crippled are going through? We talk about woman's lib, 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 Zohr 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

plastic slipper was the one thing that makes her feel most otherwise amongst the normal human beings. Like any other person, I gave her some money and walked away. I did feel extremely sad and kept on cursing the strange discrimination of the world. I hope some day some wealthy kind-hearted human being comes forward to provide a big hall room to shelter these helpless crippled human beings with the basic needs. How long must we see them helplessly begging in the open, exposed to the vagaries of nature and other pitiable conditions, crying out to draw mercy? Let not the answer to this blow away but make a way to save them.

Khawja Viqar Moynuddin
Dhaka.

Be a true leader in your own name

Sir, The election is over and the politicians are placed in proper places as desired by the people. People do not want any janonetri, deshnetri or palibandhu sort of leadership to lead the nation. A truly hon-

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 Shaheb 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. Bangabandhu died. 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 leader in your own 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 superlative title at all anyway?

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New government

Sir, This has reference of A M A 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 governments. There 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
Khulgaon, 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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