

Good Luck, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

For Sheikh Hasina, a very long journey, of becoming the elected Prime Minister of Bangladesh, came to an end with the oath-taking yesterday. But from that very moment a far harder journey has begun, that of leading the country into the 21st Century as a democratic, economically vibrant and culturally progressive nation. For that arduous journey we wish her all the luck.

It was 21 years ago that the elected government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was toppled in a murderous putsch led by a few army officers that killed almost all members of Bangabandhu's family save Sheikh Hasina and her sister Rehana. Then followed more than two decades of political wilderness for the party and its leader, accompanied with immense emotional and psychological trauma. Through it all Sheikh Hasina led her party, the Awami League, from one political stumbling-block to another. Young, and in many ways unused to the treacherous ways of our politics, Sheikh Hasina made mistakes and paid a heavy price for them. Finally together with the BNP and Jamaat, and other smaller political groups, nine years of autocratic regime of General Ershad was toppled and democracy was restored and a free and fair election held under the caretaker government of President Shahabuddin. Losing the '91 election was perhaps the greatest shock for the AL and its young leader.

Sheikh Hasina's crowning glory of becoming the elected chief executive of the country comes at the end of nearly three years of continuous agitation, and *en masse* resignation from the parliament, for realising the demand to hold elections under a neutral caretaker government. That election was held on 12 June which gave her party a majority to form the government which she did yesterday. There are many things that the election results reveal, which we are sure the party analysts will have already considered. Some of these we have already pointed out, and the rest we hope to do in the near future.

As we had said earlier, if coming to power was tough, a far tougher task lies ahead. By all objective standards, Bangladesh is a hard country to govern. That task is made harder still by the shortsighted political meanness and personality clashes of our political leaders. Though early signals are not so good, we still hope that we will see the coming of a new and more matured politics in the coming days. For all her hard challenges ahead, we wish our new Prime Minister all the luck.

Hats off to You

The caretaker government, like a wafting whiff of fragrance, was wholesome and more. Although gone now, it will linger in memory for long and act as a beacon light not only for future caretaker governments but for the regular elected ones too. Ever since December 16, 1971 this nation has known nothing to give faith in its future like this three-month stint of the Habibur Rahman government.

Not only has the Habibur Rahman government discharged their first and overwhelmingly big responsibility of holding free and fair national polls in a most exemplary manner, they have set a very good — almost unbeatable — record of good governance as well. And it is a fact that many wished this government would continue. Let the Habibur Rahman government performance form the basis on which the present government will raise a sturdy and lasting edifice of consensus and progress, stability and true freedom.

The nation knows well how the government rode safely past the delicate army eruptions. But unknown to all it had to grapple with problems hardly less knotty over all of its tenure. We don't know how they worked it but traffic jams ceased in Dhaka and prices fell. And they got it all done in spite of the fact that not one functionary had any fear of consequences from a three-month order. The caretaker government's two great points of conduct: being correct and persuasive and decent and being faultlessly austere and incorruptible, fair and steadfast helped them attain most of what they aimed at. The touch was both soft and firm.

The Habibur Rahman government did not spectacularly succeed in recovering arms and eliminating terrorism. They succeeded in containing totally their use to influence the polls.

This nation's sincerest congratulations go to the caretaker government and its weighty wing the Election Commission and all the constituents of these two.

Political Appointees

Attorney-General Nurullah and his deputy Wadud have resigned office. The A. G. has said he wanted the new government to choose its own law officers. Very nicely put, indeed. But perhaps the more compelling reason was the duo felt they were political appointees and as such would ill fit the new governmental mannings and house-setting.

We welcome the action and congratulate these senior men of law. And by the same token we would call upon all political appointees — the governmental set-up as well as autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies literally bristling with these — to resign on their own without the need of any prodding and — in the last resort weeding.

If the political beneficiaries respond to our appeal for decency a very good precedent will be set. Next time a government changes, processions out of office should ensue without anyone's asking for it — indecently. But then why should there be a political appointee at all. Why this undermining and circumventing of set governmental norms and the system of governance?

The nation would want of the new government no political appointee in offices other than political.

A World Restored: Time for Renewal

The resonance of the people's verdict is very clear. It is a mandate tempered with wisdom. People want Awami League to move cautiously avoiding the mistakes of the past regimes. People expect that if they make mistakes, they must err, on the side of caution.

EVENTS of the past weeks, before and during the elections, give us enough reasons to ponder and move cautiously. Awami League has emerged from the recent elections with majority seats; with unconditional JP support it will get absolute majority in the Parliament. But rumours inspired or otherwise, and glib hints freely delivered are building a wall of distrust between the MPs-elect and the overwhelming majority of the people of the country. Certain unknown elements not within our view are yet to fully accept the clear and unambiguous verdict given by the people of this country on both June 12 and June 19. As clarified by US Congressman Stephen Solarz, Australian Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock, Italian journalist-turned-Senator Signora Zulueta, SAARC chairman, Ambassadors Naik and Dube, the Japanese team leader and by Fakhruddin Ahmed of FEMA, Election '96 was free and fair, some minor localised irregularities notwithstanding.

Democratic traditions and the reason of state demand that all parties and politicians concerned of the country

nance of the people's verdict is very clear. It is a mandate tempered with wisdom. People want Awami League to move cautiously avoiding the mistakes of the past regimes. People expect that if they make mistakes, they must err, on the side of caution.

Statesmanship demands that Begum Zia would accept defeat and play her constructive role as Leader of the Opposition. While she has returned from all five seats and her party top notches were humbled at the people's podium proves that there was a rot in the state of Denmark. No amount of justification, no perfumes of Arabia could wash away, and no protestations of election-fixing would change the reality. It is not negative voting on electronic media turns and twists, as suggested by some, that led to the collapse of the inner sanctum of the House of Begum Zia. The verdict was given by the majority of the people.

People wanted a change and the change has arrived. One shouldn't forget why the media largely went against Begum Zia. Shouldn't we remember June 21, 1992, when a gaggle of police hoodlums were let

his dream. During these 21 years those who craved for the ideologies of our Liberation suffered immensely. In the practical hands of Sheikh Hasina, a politician of the post-modern computer era, lies the burden of fulfilling the dreams of Bangabandhu. Not an easy task. She has to positively channelise the energy of the millions who suffer from the wounds of attempts to distort history. The dark forces distorting history and wounding the souls of the youth still lurk behind. The attempt to frustrate the spirit of Liberation still goes on.

With the war on terrorism the new prime minister will require her colleagues demonstrating to honesty and transparency. As tradition goes, young princeling and aspirant rulers in ancient India were taught the art of good administration. The tutors would tell their pupils — to rule a country or state well, to keep their citizens happy and content, a ruler must keep in mind the four maxims and strictly follow this order: *kaam, daan, dandh* and *vedh*. Effective use of the art of governance will help her, inter alia, in eliminating palace coups and Bonapartism.

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



would accept the people's verdict gracefully. Any other option would be political mercenaryism and therefore, hurtful to democracy. Even an undemocratic political philosopher, Machiavelli, abhorred the idea of mercenaryism in army as well as in politics.

Democracy is cheered because it admits variety and it permits criticism. Atal Behari Vajpayee, BJP prime minister for 13 days, expressed his satisfaction that democracy in India works. He thanked his party and the people of India that he could play his role till he lost in vote of confidence in serving the cause of democracy in India; he offered unstinted congratulations to successor Deve Gowda on his election as the new prime minister.

All powers of the Republic belong to the people. Mrs Gandhi lost at Amethi because she failed to gauge the sentiments of the people. She lost their confidence. In opposition she reached out again to the same people and they responded. It is thus said that democracy, like any non-coercive relationship, rests on a shared understanding of limits. But this is to an extent true of every ruling class, be it a monarchy, an oligarchy or a dukedom. King Canute took his whole cabinet to sea shores and commanded the waves to stop — but in vain, and that is how he demonstrated to the members of his cabinet the limits of power.

History is thus little more than the register of crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind. It is the progressive movement of people towards something better. This is how the June 12 is a landmark in Bangladesh politics. By giving a majority, mandate to Awami League but not absolute majority, after 21 years, the reso-

lution on the Press Club, unprecedented in the history of democracy? Have we soon forgotten how the minority students were brutalised a day before Begum Zia's fateful Ekushey February visit to Bangla Academy? If a large portion of bureaucracy supported the movement for the people's right to choose, none else can be blamed but Begum Zia herself and/or her closest aides. Will the people of Bangladesh ever forget how brutally and unconscionably the government retired over 500 officers both civil and military in total disregard to the existing service rules and codes of service discipline?

As you sow, so you reap — so the saying goes. The bitter harvest of failure is thus to be evaluated in the above context. But then that is the essence of democracy. When you go to the people once in a while to seek their mandate, you make yourself accountable to them. As a quick look at the psephological trend of Election '96 shows, the people overwhelmingly rejected ersatz democracy. They rejected recalcitrant politics. They rejected the philosophy of *la belle époque* of Begum Zia's governance.

In August 1972 when Bangabandhu was in Geneva for convalescence as the guest of Swiss government, I saw a dream in his eyes. The dream of a country for the Bengalee people, a country where we could live as a free people with dignity and honour. A country where the sacrifice of the valiant freedom fighters will be valued and appreciated.

Full twenty-one years have passed since the tragic murders of Bangabandhu, the dreamer, and those who fought selflessly and uncompromisingly for the liberation of this country, and the fulfilment of

The people voted for renewal of the hopes and aspirations symbolised by the spirit and ideal of the War of Liberation. For that we need the ballast of moral underpinnings. Justice Holmes stated: "The law is the witness and external deposit of our moral life. Its history is the history of the moral development of the race." Loss of ideologies festers materialism and terrorism. To face it squarely while the goal should be eradication of corruption, it will be essential to ensure undiluted defence to the people. Sheikh Hasina's address at the Bar Association on the separation of the Executive from the Judiciary is the first but the most important step towards that direction.

Castiglione was unhappy with Sprezzatura (nonchalance or recklessness) in a ruler. It is dangerous in a democracy. The decades-old effort to destroy our history is analogous to the story of destruction of Melos by the Athenians.

The people have refused to surrender. For the renewal of the spirit of Liberation we must uphold national independence and democratic right through an administration with a moral base. I very often read the admirable sentence of Flaubert: "Just when the gods had ceased to be, and Christ had not yet come, there was a unique movement in history, the movement of Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone."

In our history that unique moment has arrived. The moment, if handled properly, can help us restore the world we lost. The world that will bring hope to the younger generation. The world that will make terrorism unnecessary. And the world that will usher in old family values to give us the power of sustenance.

OPINION

Provocative and Insinuating

Abdul Kader

It is unfortunate note that on the eve of historic June 12 parliamentary elections in Bangladesh an international news magazine of repute, *The Economist* of London in its June 8 issue — in my opinion — tried to half the progress of democracy in our country by dishing out a provocative and rash write-up under a queer headline: Bangladesh's Last Chance (!). Reading between the lines, a careful reader will at once discern that its only intention was to influence the election results and to create a smokescreen vis-a-vis the recent happenings in the army and thereby undermine the status of the public leaders to the general masses.

By volunteering unwarranted advice, the magazine also put our armed forces into an awkward position in the public eye. Shedding crocodile tears for Bangladesh's democracy it failed to hide its motive behind the story as can be seen from its observations, such as "If this general election (June 12) goes wrong, the army's patience may snap" (why it apprehended so?), "The generals want Bangladesh to remain democratic," etc. By indulging in such hollow and unbridled figments of imagination, it has utterly betrayed its ignorance about the actual state of political affairs in Bangladesh whose democratic people rightly slapped on the cheeks of *The Economist* headline. They cast their votes freely and fearlessly without hindrance from any quarters. The people

did not see *The Economist* line or suggestions.

With a moral boost from the world opinion and encouraged by the presence of foreign observers, the people of this country has written a new chapter in its democratic history as has been aptly described by a columnist of repute. With a Dinkal at the top, the caretaker government's fool-proof arrangement ensured largest turnout. The election passed off very peacefully and the performance of the voters, election officials and the law and order agencies were highly praised by all concerned. Including the President, the Chief Adviser, the chief Election Commissioner and the foreign observers. The election was conducted in such a copy-book style, accuracy, promptness and wisdom that the whole show gave no chances to anybody to rig. It is unethical too that *The Economist* preferred to play on a discordant note while the democratic people were in a festive mood to welcome the return of parliamentary democracy in the true sense of the term. Instead of wishing success to the efforts of the nation, the magazine came out with an otherwise suggestion.

The observations made by the magazine, perhaps on the basis of briefing from its Dhaka-based informants, have done more harm to our 'sons-of-the-soil' than good, and also quite contrary to their democratic image that they have had clearly showed since

1991. Perhaps, the far-away mouthpiece of the 'vested interest' have no knowledge of the fact that our valiant armed forces, besides being sentinels of independence also do play the role of pillars of democracy under guidance of many able generals.

The provocation comes when it suggests: "If the army in the end overcomes its reluctance and steps in, the blame will be on the politicians." There are many brains of politicians in Bangladesh. Which categories it points to? *The Economist* clearly violated journalistic ethics when it remarked: "If she (which one?) claims she was cheated (in elections) and rallies her supporters for another period of chaos, the army will probably step in." Our patriotic armed forces perhaps, failed to read the message from across the oceans and wisely 'stepped out' of the bait by honouring the sovereign will of the people. *The Economist's* election verdict was that 'Sheikh Hasina has to live down her party's past in which her father, the country's first President, abolished multi-party democracy," while 'Begum Khaleda can make a reasonable claim for a new mandate.' *The Economist* will do well to remember that much water has flown down the river Buriganga since 1975. The comeback of Awami League has been the destiny of the nation.

And Also '96 is not '75 or '82 or '91 and that Bangladesh is not Burma.

Congratulations are in Order: Pragmatism Must be in Tow

by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad

The new Prime Minister takes over the leadership of a nation that, at this time, faces myriad problems and extremely difficult choices. The proposals contained in the election manifesto of the Awami League and the electoral speeches and other policy issues must be placed in proper perspective and shape

SHEIKH Hasina has assumed the high office of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Hearty congratulations to her and her government. She has struggled long and hard and sought the verdict of the people so that she can serve them. The people have reposed their trust in her. The nation now looks up to her as it looks forward to a better society, better economy, better environment and solid progress towards the 21st century. Indeed, this government has been mandated to take the nation into the 21st century.

Sheikh Hasina's elevation to the position of Prime Minister of Bangladesh completes a triad. This I have often thought, must happen. There were three key players determining the emergence of Bangladesh: the architect of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib (in my view 'Sheikh Mujib' portrays the greatness and charisma of the person who led this nation to independence and the deep esteem and affection of the people he earned in that critical phase of the nation's history with greater force than the use of his full name Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or any title including Bangabandhu), the villain of the piece Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and a friend in need Indira Gandhi. Indira Gandhi was, at the time, head of the government of India.

Sheikh Mujib became head of the government and of the state of Bangladesh, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto also became head of the government and of the state in Pakistan. Rajiv Gandhi, son of Indira Gandhi, became Prime Minister of India years ago and Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, is currently the Prime Minister of Pakistan, having held that position once before. Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujib, comes in last

and completes the triad. This should be a unique historical occurrence.

Three days before the 12 June elections, I argued in an article (Sangbad, 9 June 1996) why Awami League should win this time. Reasons given included that the change would strengthen the democratic process in the country and that Sheikh Hasina was coming through as a more constructive and purposeful leader. The completion of the triad mentioned above is not in fact an argument why Sheikh Hasina should become Prime Minister of Bangladesh but something that should be of historical interest now and in the future. She has earned this office by dint of hard work over the years and by the quality of leadership she provided during the last electoral campaign. Coming in last, she does have an opportunity to learn from the experiences of the other two. One hopes she will be a forward looking, pro-people, and effective leader of Bangladesh and its citizens.

Let congratulations celebrations and jubulations last as long as they must — better be as short as possible. It is important that the government soon let the people of Bangladesh and the world know that it is in business in right earnest. The new Prime Minister takes over the leadership of a nation that, at this time, faces myriad problems and extremely difficult choices. The proposals contained in the election manifesto of the Awami League and the electoral speeches made by its leaders are surely intentions and ideas. Now, those and other policy issues must needs be placed in proper perspective and shape — within an overall national development framework. On the economic

front, there is in place a reform programme aimed at accelerating economic growth. It is important to address the issues involved in the process in the light of the failure of the programme so far to make an impact on the economic growth rate. Privatisation, financial regulation including financial and labour market reforms are two principal elements in this programme and in both the areas there have been serious lack of performance. Even if decisions were taken, there were serious slip-ups in implementation. Sensible, honest, solid, forward looking deregulation and privatisation are indeed essential for putting the economy in proper shape. Bureaucracy must be curtailed. Decentralisation and devolution are obviously of crucial importance in this context. Two other broad elements in the reform programme relate to globalisation and the role of planning. These also need to be addressed, keeping the relevant dynamics in focus. In the whole economic process, poverty alleviation needs to be given the primacy that it deserves. Then there are the issues that relate to the environmental sustainability of growth and social sectors such as education, training and health, which call for urgent attention. And so do many other aspects of national life.

I am sure the issues mentioned above and other important ones will be uppermost in the consideration of the government. My purpose in mentioning them here is to reinforce the urgency that should be attached to the need for developing a comprehensive policy framework in the light of past experiences, the realities on the ground, and future prospects. In this context, the first 100 days may be crucial.

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.

An appeal to Sheikh Hasina

Sir, The people at large are eagerly looking forward to see Awami League as 'the government of the people, by the people and for the people.' The aspirations of the people are high indeed in seeing democratic culture re-established firmly in every sphere of our social and national life, after more than two decades of misrule of a bunch of corrupt and upstart people. In keeping with their philosophy, 'money is no problem.' They imposed a gaudy and eye-catching lifestyle which, no doubt, was totally inconsistent with the country's economic reality.

As a part of that show-off, their ministers in parliamentary standing committee meetings, used to sit in chairs which were more like thrones and, as such, they (the ministers) looked like grotesque figures to the beholders' eyes. The ministers/presidents of even highly rich nations do not use that kind of ornamental and ceremonial chairs, whose rightful place should be in a museum.

I would, therefore, appeal to Sheikh Hasina, the next Prime Minister of the country, not to sit on that kind of chair even for a day and I ask her ministers to do likewise. She should arrange for auction sale of these chairs and replace them by functional and business-like chairs, immediately, as we all want to see her government down to earth, and not ceremonial ones like those of the BNP's and JPs.

M.A. Sattar
1/G, Parbagh, Dhaka.

Geneva camp

Sir, Geneva Camp located at Mohammadpur in Dhaka is the largest concentration of stranded Pakistanis residing place which is more than 18,000 persons. It is far better in comparison to other camps dotted all over Bangladesh by virtue of its location in the heart of the capital. Almost all camps of stranded Pakistanis lack in basic amenities and sufferings of stranded Pakistanis are manifold which are well-known to all.

A handful persons known as butchers have been actively engaged in illegal slaughtering of animals, and earning million of taka at Geneva camp for the last several decades. Much have been written on the subject by different letter-writers which appeared in national dailies from October to December 1994. It is to our utter surprise and dismay that no action has been taken either by DCC or any competent authority.

A very alarming situation has arisen. Most of these people of Geneva Camp live in luxurious rented houses outside the camps. Their houses at Geneva camp solely for killing animals, ignoring all civic norms. The process starts before the break of dawn and continues up to 9 am under the protection of local miscreants. Law enforcing agency is fully aware of the fact but remains silent and playing the role of mere spectator. What does it mean?

Because of this massive, illegal and unauthorised killing of animals, Geneva camp has virtually turned into a 'killing house' of the city. Geneva camps in recent days have become a 'goose laying golden eggs' for them. These flow of black money have given birth to crimes and criminals. Besides these illegal killing of animals are creating health hazards, including TB, cancer and other deadly diseases and social problems for the poor and oppressed stranded Pakistanis.

We don't understand as to why the authorities kept their eyes closed and seems that the City Corporation has allowed free slaughter of animals at any place, at any time and by anyone without giving minimum consideration to public utility. Will the Mayor be kind enough to give a reply to us?

In conclusion, we hope that City Corporation will come forward without wasting a moment to curb this social menace once and for all to rescue stranded Pakistanis from these nasty butchers who are the only source of all troubles and problems at Geneva camp.

Md. Nizamuddin
Secretary, Popular Front of Stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh
Saidpur, Nilphamari.

Dhaka WASA

Sir, I draw the attention of the Dhaka WASA authority to the untold and unaccounted sufferings of the inhabitants for water scarcity of the areas viz. East Goran Medina Mosque Road, Road No 8, Road No 10, Road No 10A.

The sources of water supply are: Shantipur deep tubewell (only produces 600 to 700 liters per minute — it needs further drilling) and Meradia pump is out of order creating desert-like condition in Meradia areas. It only left Noorbagh deep tubewell for supply of water for 10 lakh people.

Immediately after the beginning of the dry season from November the area mentioned turned into a desert, and the situation went out of the control of the WASA Zone

Modes-6, Fakirapool. The situation is fully unmanageable if they sincerely and honestly tried their best to address/redress the sufferings of the people.

In view of the increased demand of water, constructions of multi-storied buildings from Meradia to Bashabod Eastern Housing Project to Kamalapur Railway Station, the sources of water are quite inadequate. The water supplies from the Noorbagh deep tubewell do not cross over to: Medina Mosque Road, Road No 10, Road No 10A, Road No 8 and the surrounding areas. Therefore, the inhabitants applied for the installation of deep tubewell at a corner plot of Road No 10A through acquisition of land and it is now under the consideration of WASA authority of Kawanbazar. I, on behalf of the inhabitants of the affected areas appeal to the ministry concerned as well as WASA authority to look into the water crisis.

Md. Joyal Abedin Bhuiyan
289/1, East Goran, Medina Mosque Road, Dhaka

Why Sher-e-Bangla?

The letter that appeared in these columns under the above heading from 'A Curious Citizen' of Dhaka on 18.6.96 has drawn my attention. The curious citizen says that the Sher-e-Bangla was never a member of the Awami League and he never utilised boat as his symbol any time during his political career. This statement is only partially correct.

It is true that he was never a member of the Awami League. But in the election of 1954, the United Front of the Awami League (led by HS Suhrawardy and Moulana Bhasani) and Krishak Proja Party (led by Sher-e-Bangla) used boat as its symbol. The United Front got all the Muslim seats except nine under separate electoral system. In that election the symbol of the United Front was a boat and Sher-e-Bangla contested and won the election with that symbol.

Prof. M. A. Jabbar Khan
Batalayur, Kajar, Rajshahi.

Exams Exams

Sir, Examinations for the post of Thana Education Officer and Probationary Officer for IFIC Bank are going to be held at the same time on June 28, 1996. But there are many candidates who have applied for both the posts. These common applicants are facing a problem as to in which exam will they appear. I am one of those who have received two interview cards. So I request to the authorities concerned to shift one of the exams at afternoon or to the next Friday.

Azad Kabir
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