Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Tragic to the Core

Dhaka, Friday, June 28, 1996

Our anguish and outrage over the car bomb blast in a Saudi defence ministry building have been intense beyond words. This is not just because our own citizens have fallen victim to a tragedy that occurred in a country held in high esteem but also because citizens of other countries friendly to us and bound together, by a common mission in Saudi Arabia have been dealt a blow.

Look at the mindlessness of the perpetration evidenced in the targeting of a whole building complex housing numerous people of different nationalities! While among the Americans 23 died instantaneously 109 were injured, the long list of the wounded included 147 Saudis, 118 Bangladeshis, four Egyptians and two Jordanians, Indonesians and Filipinos each.

That the terrorists can freely choose the time, place and victims of their attacks has been proved to the hilt once again.

Whether the attack was engineered in the Arab world nobody knows for sure, but some tendentious things have been occurring in Saudi Arabia, or more so in the extended Arab world, for quite some time now. For one thing, the presence of foreign troops had not been taken kindly to by the conservatives in the Arab society who regarded it as an impingement on sovereignty and also anticulture. In last November, an explosion at a US-run military training centre in Riyadh took a toll of five Americans and two Indians. Four Saudis in a confessional statement thereafter said they were influenced by Islamic groups outside the Kingdom.

The militants in the Arab world in a rabid manifestation of stridency against modernism, science and technology are getting cocooned, and consequently, reactionary to anything of western origin A stable and democratic Saudi society can checkmate such a tendency and strengthen the hands of the Saudi government to deal effectively with any spill-over of extremism from outside.

Since the international community has suffered grievously from the latest terrorist attack it should feel obliged to devise ways to combat any recurrence of this in the Arab world or even elsewhere after they have hunted down the culprits.

Meanwhile, we send our deepest condolences to the families of the dead and express our fullest sympathy for the wounded victims of the tragedy.

Reform in BNP

In a significant shake-up of the party hierarchy, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia elevated Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan to the post of secretary general. Abdus Salam Talukder who had held the position for the last nine years resigned earlier. Mannan Bhuiyan is not totally unfamiliar with the responsibilities he has been called upon to discharge; for as the senior-most joint secretary general of the party, he stepped into the job several times before to act on his predecessor's behalf. The change in the hierarchy comes in apparent reaction to the party's setback in the recently held parliamentary elections.

When saddled in power political parties often overlook the need for internal reform. As a hardliner, Salam Talukder was not beyond controversy within the party itself. In the '93 BNP convention when expectations of his removal ran high, the BNP opted for status quo. The election reverses should now make the BNP leadership go for a serious soul-searching. As a coherent political body where did the BNP fail?

Now that the party is in the opposition, it should build on the lessons learnt from the past mistakes. If a party's commitment to democracy within the party is not total, it is not expected to go the whole hog in establishing democracy in society. That out of power political parties make sky-high pledges to the electorate and take no time in forgetting them after assuming power is only natural because democratic practices - such as accountability and transparency - within the party have been a rarity.

Mannan Bhuiyan's sobering and efficient touch, let us hope, will turn the BNP into a more popular and democratic organisation. It is reported that more changes are on the cards. The failure of a number of BNP stalwarts to win the election is a clear proof that something has really gone wrong. More importantly, there was no think-tank in the party who could spare time and energy for the party's organisational work. This is another reason why a thorough reform of the party is necessary.

Drug Trafficking

There is a concern that Bangladesh is being used as a new route for smuggling drugs by traffickers of the Golden Triangle or of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The lucrative nature of this smuggling business has an effect on our society. Bangladesh is thought to have already entered into a drug-related vicious cycle.

No one says that the country has become another Colombia or Panama. But there is at least one similarity with them which is that the drug-money laundering is carried out here on some scale. That is of concern because their influence and manipulative power might grow.

We would like to draw the administration's attention to the close links between the rise of terrorism and the abuse of drugs. Now that the new government has expressed its determination to fight terrorism on a priority basis, we suggest that the drive against drugs be included in the over-all plan or policy strategy. The drive should be specially meant to catch the local players in the drug game, none of whom so far could be touched. This poses a challenge before the home ministry which must not lose any time to deal with it.

The First One Hundred Days

by Rounaq Jahan

In her post-election statements, Sheikh Hasina has maintained the low key modest approach. She has also consistently talked about the priorities of her administration - restoration of law and order and rule of law, service to people, accountability and transparency, and freedom of the media. This consistency has helped in creating further goodwill for the new government.

Sheikh Hasina repeatedly emphasised a few key changes she would bring into governance if she was elected to power. She talked about eliminating government sponsored violence and terror and restoring law and order. She promised establishment of rule of law. She pledged a transparent and accountable administration. - a government that would serve and not behave like masters of its citizens. She promised to administer the country on the basis of national consensus. She urged reconciliation and cooperation amongst contending parties

VERY démocratic elec-

tion raises citizens' ho-

pes as contending pa-

rties attempt to voice peoples

concerns and promises

multitude of actions. The

expectations are even higher

when people vote for a change

of government as they did in

the Bangladesh election in

June. The unprecedented

voter turn out demonstrate

that citizens were quite aware

of what was at stake. By giving

its verdict in favour of the

Awami League (AL), people not

only expressed their support

for the policies and actions the

AL pledged, more significantly

they signalled their rejection

of some of the blatant actions

of misrule by the Bangladesh

National Party (BNP) govern-

An intelligent election

campaign

Bangladesh political scene

would agree that the AL ran a

very intelligent election cam-

paign both in substance and in

style. It effectively exploited

the failures and blunders of the

BNP rule. To keep the focus.

the AL repeatedly highlighted

a few concerns uppermost in

citizens' minds such as the de-

teriorating law and order, vio-

lence and terror unleashed by

armed cadres of the BNP, cor-

ruption and partisan influence

tion obstructing justice and

rule of law. The AL defended

its record of past rule better. It

underscored the special chal

lenge of massive rehabilitation

and reconstruction work in a

country devastated by war and

publicized comparative statis-

tics on different activities

during its rule and other

regimes. The AL also effec

tively countered the BNP's

negative campaigns such as the

slogans that the AL would sell

off the country to India and

that Islam would be in danger

if the AL were to assume

power. The AL pre-empted the

BNP's anti-India campaign by

declaring the party's intention

not to renew the Treaty of

Friendship with India and put

out data and information on

the AL administration's better

record on sharing of water re-

sources. All in all, the BNP's

negative campaign harped on

the old slogans and was not as

salient this time around. More

significantly, the AL consis-

tently tried to project a posi-

tive, responsible image for the

party — a party ready to govern

again and lead the nation to

the 21st century.

over civil military administra-

Most observers of the

She pledged freedom for the media, particularly autonomy for public radio and TV. The style of the campaign portray ing the party as modest and humble, seeking forgiveness for past failures and asking for a chance to serve the people again - was also appealing to voters. In her post-election statements. Sheikh Hasina has maintained the low key modest approach. She has also consistently talked about the

priorities of her administration restoration of law and order and rule of law, service to people, accountability and trans parency, and freedom of the media. This consistency has helped in creating further goodwill for the new govern

The First Hundred Days Agenda

However, we should remember that every new gov ernment is customarily expected to enjoy only a brief period of honeymoon. The new government will probably try to use this narrow window of opportunity to begin a fresh start at tackling some of our long standing problems and create a sense of regeneration Given the sophistication with which the AL ran its election campaign, I fully expect the new government to be already working on its first one hundred days agenda. But as the AL has promised to be open and responsive to ideas from outside. I list below a few issues that deserve attention in the first hundred days agenda:

A competent and non corrupt team to carry forward the new governments' agenda : A cabinet has already been formed and appointments to other high level political and administrative positions are expected in the next three months. The government will probably also establish various committees, commissions, advisory groups and taskforces on different issues. The quality of people who would be nominated or appointed and their representativeness will be important issues that will deserve careful attention. The AL has repeatedly talked about eliminating corruption and recognizing merit. We would expect the AL to select persons who would meet these high standards of quality. While a politieal party often has to reward its faithfuls, it should also be able to attract the services of the best available people particularly for specialized and technical work. in the past, governments

sustained enthusiasm and services of competent people with professional integrity because incompetent psychophancy was valued over honest criticism. This must be avoided this time. The citizens of this country are increasingly losing trust in the governments capacity for translating their pre-election promises into action. In terms of quality we expect to see people with visions and ideas, competence and professionalism and honesty and integrity in high positions. The representation should be broad based with special care given to include the generally under represented e.g. women and minori ties. To facilitate consensus building, the various committees and task forces should have bi-partisan membership. For continued support of major policies and actions the involvement of all three major

have often failed to keep the

parties are essential. Elaboration of concrete actions to implement the agenda: The broad items on the AL agenda is already known to us. What people expect in the next hundred days is an elaboration of some concrete steps

government plans to reach those broad goals of restoring rule of law, eliminating violence, establishing transparency and accountability, reducing poverty and so on. These steps need to be clearly articulated and debated. A clear exposition of these concrete actions can perform a tremendous public education function, raise citizens awareness and create a sense of national purpose which has been missing for quite sometime now. To borrow an example from another country, in 1992, soon after his election as President of the USA. Bill Clinton held a nationally televised seminar discussing and debating the key policy options facing the country. The newly elected president's clear grasp of issues and strategies very quickly created a sense of confidence in the new governments' ability to handle the economy. While in Bangladesh we need not follow the exact same model, one or two much shorter debates in the style of the recently televised Sobinay Jante Chai, can help project more clearly the actions being considered by the new government small and the pros and cons of some of these

and actions as to how the new

Consensus Building: The AL's emphasis on consensus building and the pledge to govern on the basis of national consensus has been a welcome move. Again people would expect to see some concrete steps in that direction in the next hundred days. But consensus building is a slow and time consuming task. It involves dialogues with different groups It requires on open mind to listen to others, understand where common ground can be created and recognize where differences cannot be bridged. Consensus building often requires a step by step approach, a willingness to work together on a few issues where common ground exists e.g. restoration of law and order, elimination of terror and violence, while still maintaining the differences over others. It is easier to build

consensus on pragmatic issues

rather than on deeply held val-

ues and ideology In Bangladesh a consensus appears to be emerging on issues relating to the economy The new government should start its consensus building efforts around these issues, i.e. poverty reduction, elimination of illiteracy, health for all where common ground could be worked out more easily and then move on to more divisive issues at a later stage. In areas where national consensus does not exist because of the misinformation campaign of the last two decades, e.g. question of nationalist movement, national identity, role of religion in state affairs, the first step should be to provide correct information. Availability of cor rect information is the basis for making informed choices. Law and order and Rule of

Law: The new government has

highlighted restoration of law

and order as its number one task. It has also urged the government officials to follow rules and undertake actions as par law. Both tasks are important and urgent but both should be done in a transparent and accountable manner People in this country have been subjected to arbitrary and partisan practice and violence for a very long time. To restore law and order, the government must first win public confidence by demonstrating that people in power and authority are also being subjected to the same, standards, rules, and laws. Indeed, if the new government can establish a rule of law, which is the first and foremost duty of any civilized government, (but unfortunately past governments failed to do this so far), it would be able to accomplish many other things which are on its priority list i.e., tackle corruption, encour age foreign investment, reduce violence and establish account

Democratic Practices: The new government has identified the parliament and the media as the two key institutions for upholding democrats practise Parliament would have to function as a democratic institution; the legitimate role and responsibility of the loyal opposition would have to be reognized and the committees would have to be properly constituted and functioning. In the first hundred days people would also expect to see the public radio and TV freed up from being a mindless propaganda machine of the govern

Local government: Decentralization, devolution of responsibilities and power and strengthening of local level governance would have to leature prominently in the first hundred days agenda: Reform issues should be debated pubicly and communities and non-government organizations should be involved in the dia-

logue and debates around local

governance reforms.

Economic Policy Framework: Though there appears to be a broad consensus on the economic policy framework. more detailed work would be necessary in setting priorities and identifying strategies and creating confidence for foreign investment. Again in deciding priorities and strategies. greater participation of different sections of the civil society should be ensured.

Articulating a vision: Generally in a parliamentary democracy, the prime minister is supposed to function as the first among equals. His/her management role is assumed to be of primary importance. In the current context of Bangladesh, however, when the new government is committed to bring about a fundamental change in the quality of governance and lead the country to the next century, the head of the government would have to consistently articulate a clear vision of the new direction. Without such a strong focus on the new vision it would be too easy for the government to fall back on the old practises. Media can play a very important role in this articulation. The prime minister may consider addressing one or two televised press conferences in the first three months giving details of the new policies and actions and answering questions from the press. This will project her vision as well as demonstrate her willingness to be account-

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Emergency-born Children Become Adults

I think that all the government agencies, which affect the lives of people, should be under constant scrutiny.

And this job should be entrusted to leading public men, not to the bureaucrats or judges. The scrutiny will

become a white-wash if it is given to a bureaucrat and a long-winded legal document if entrusted to a judge

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

OES June 26 mean any thing to you? It should Because on this date. vears ago. Mrs Indira Gandhi, then prime minister. switched off lights in India. In the darkness of terror and tyranny, the nation suffered untold miseries, not only at her hands but those of her son Sanjay Gandhi. Their personal rule continued for 31 months until the election saw them

There was no law which they did not bend, no rule which they did not flout and no institution which they did not misuse to chastise critics and to smother dissent Technically, it was the declara tion of the emergency. In real ity, it was authoritarianism all because she was disqualified to hold a public office following a poll offense. To protect themselves and their families. even government servants and the police willingly carried out illegal orders and had no compunction in inflicting brutali ties on the innocent.

What torments me is that none of the guilty has been punished. All those who violated laws, issued blank warrants for arrest and carried out arbitrary actions with impunity have thrived in service and politics. It is not one TN Seshan, one VC Shukla or one Siddharth Shankar Ray, who is to blame. There are hundreds of them who have either retired or ceased to be in the limelight. Yet all of them have gone scotfree.

Some cases were processed and presented before courts. But by the time they were disposed of, Mrs Gandhi came back to power. Indian people. who are innured to sufferings. know penance, not punishment. Instead, the officers who had brought the excesses during the emergency to light were harassed and hounded out. The ones who had been found guilty were rewarded and given cushy postings.

The mood of courts also changed. VC Shukla and Sanjay Gandhi were punished in the case of Kissa Kursi Ka, a film which was destroyed under orders from the two. Before Mrs Gandhi assumed power the Supreme Court had gone to the extent of even cancelling the bail of Sanjay

Gandhi for one month on the ground that he had abused the liberty by attempting to suborn the prosecution witness. With the advent of Mrs Gandhi, the entire case fell.

This was the same Supreme Court which had upheld the declaration of the emergency (Justice H R Khanna was the only exception and he was superseded). Justice Y Chandrachud one of the judges, has at least regretted the judgement since. But Justice P N Bhagwati has not although Dean of Law Tripathi when he quoted in support of his judgment, has said that Bhagwati misinterpreted him Instead, Bhagwati has gone ahead, if office is the criterion to judge success. He occupies a seat in the UN body on human rights and civil liberties.

Some others have also done 'well'. Bansi Lal is again the Harvana chief minister. He was defence minister during the emergency and Sanjay Gandhi's hatchet man. The BJP, which claims to pursue a value-based politics, is an ardent supporter of Bansi Lal. In fact, the party has its ministers in his cabinet.

"For purely personal rea sons, he (Bansi Lal) grossly misused his position as chief minister and abused his authority. He went after three generations of a family to satisfy his appetite for vengeance. In the process, he got the reports fabricated for the sole purpose of denying a youngman an office in the judicia service which would have made his career. He got Pitambar Lal Goyal, his father uncle and grandfather detained also. He appears to have pursued his animosity against the Goyal family even when he was appointed as defence minister in the Government of India and got the rules changed so as to disable a detenu and particularly Goyal from taking a competitive ex-

This is the observation by the Shah Commission, which went into the excesses during

BETWEEN THE LINES

the emergency. But as the follow-up action. If at all, the commission itself pointed out Without the awareness of what is right and a desire to act according to what is right there may be no realisation of what is wrong. During the emergency, for many a public functionary the dividing line between right and wrong. moral and immoral, ceased to exist." This is a tragedy of the emergency-hurt India. After Narasimha Rao came

to power. I thought at times that Congress would express regrets over the imposition of the emergency. He was then a lesser fry. Whatever his compulsions, he has failed to make amends. Today, when he wants all Congressmen to return to the party fold, he does not seem to realise that many of them left because of Sanjay Gandhi's misdoings and Mrs Gandhi's silence when told about them. By expressing regret. Rao might have sold Congress a bit better.

But there does not seem to be such a possibility. Rao has not followed the Shah Commission's recommendations even on the CBI and similar agencies, which Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi used to wreak their personal vendetta. The commission wanted the institutions to be accountable and transparent in their working.

Had this been the case, the havala scandal, which came to light four and a half years ago. would have been pursued more vigorously. In fact, at one point the CBI was about to drop the case. There was a proposal to destroy the diary and account books. Since they were required for the prosecution of a suspended CBI official, they were retained. The Supreme Court had to coax the agency for information as well as the

emergency and the postemergency happenings under line some point it is that the

CBI should be autonomous. It is, however, disturbing that the BJP, when it was facing a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha, appointed the next CBI chief. The vacancy is to occur on July 1. What was the hurry? I do not want to divulge the details. But, of all the persons, former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee does not come out well.

The fact is that agencies like the CBI which suffered the most during the emergency have not been able to insulate themselves against political pressures. There is interference in the working as the havala scandal proceedings at the Supreme Court indicated. Appointments and transfers are also at the whims of prime minister, who directly controls most of the agencies.

I think that all the government agencies, which affect the lives of people, should be under constant scrutiny. And this job should be entrusted to leading public men, not to the bureaucrats or judges. The scrutiny will become a whitewash if it is given to a bureaucrat and a long-winded legal document if entrusted to a judge. And once the report of public men is ready, it should be debated openly. Only then will the officials in the agencies feel afraid of the stigma in

case they are found wanting. In the same way, laws con cerning the public should be periodically scrutinised. An act, once it is on the statute book, should not be forgotten Its operation should be under constant review. There should be some mechanism to judge wether the original purpose of

the act has been served or not If a law has become redundant, it should be scrapped. And if it is being misused, the loopholes should be plugged.

If at all there is a lesson to be learnt from the emergency it is that the rulers should be answerable. Winning at the polls is not enough, the charges of misrule should be cleared in a court of law. In the present Lok Sabha, there are nearly 85 members against whom there are charges of murder, rape and the like. It will be a mockery of justice if their election to the house taken as their exoneration. And it may sound pedantic

but there is no going away from the fact that the moral component must take its legit imate place in every decisionmaking process. Mrs Gandhi or, for that matter, her successors have not followed the dictum. Those in power do not realise that they are the custodians of a nation's ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes and of its hopes. They have been unfaithful to the trust.

There is no guarantee that the old vision will be revived. Perhaps this will be the job of such men and women as have attained adulthood after having been born 21 years ago, on June 26, 1975.

Make sure that Ministers

do not head the Parliamentary

Committees. Try to put non-

these committees

be meticulously fulfilled.

Awami Leaguers as chairmen of

made prior to election should

sion of giving duty-free cars to

the MP's. This provision is

8. The pledges the party

9. Kindly cancel the provi-

OPINION

Dos and Don'ts

Through your esteemed newspaper I would like to send some messages for the leader of the majority party in the just concluded national election. Sheikh Hasina of

Awami League. In August 1975, the killers of Bangabandhu did not just kill the father of the newly independent nation but along with him the whole spirit of the liberation war. That is why they replaced the symbolic slogan Joy Bangla with Zindabad, changed Bangladesh Betar to Radio Bangladesh, twisted the history of the liberation war etc.

After 21 years of misrule the pro-liberation forces are about to take charge of the country. Therefore Sheikh Hasina has to be extra careful so that the anti-liberation and anti-people forces do not get opportunity to make a come back. I therefore make a fervent appeal to Sheikh Hasina and the other prominent lead ers to observe the following:-

I. Khaleda Zia, while transforming the government system from Presidential to the Parliamentary one, actually made it a Prime Ministerial system by enjoying all the privileges of the President. This should be reversed.

2. Kindly do not make any defeated leader a technocrat minister. This tantamounts to slap on the constituency.

3. Kindly do not close the road fully for a long spell of time when Prime Minister travels along the city roads This really annoys the public.

4. Please do not put Prime Minister's name on the body of the buses which are donated to the universities from state fund as has been done in the past. Just put the word Prime Minister and the date which will spell out who was the prime minister at that time. 5. Immediately make the Radio and Television com-

pletely autonomous headed by a team comprising of neutral intellectuals and prominent citizens. 6. Repeal the Special

Powers Act immediately.

greatly misused by MPs' whose brand new cars are, in fact, driven by top businessmen while the MPs continue to use old dilapidated cars. A visit to the MPs car park at the

Sangshad Bhaban will reveal the conditions of the majority Do not let vengeance rule over law while dealing with corruption of the previous regime. But do not let corrup-

tion go unpunished no matter who has committed it. Make sure that sons and

daughters of the leaders do not change their way of life and standard of living to higher level suddenly. 12. Do not ignore the let-

ters published in national dailies no matter how unimportant these seem to be Please remember that this is the only way ordinary private citizens can ventilate their grievances to public.

13. There could be mistakes while governing. Do not try to justify some unintentional wrong-doings by issuing government press notes as in the case of Yasmin of Dinajpur.

Please remember that common people's basic requirements are very limited and small. They are ready to be happy with much less than what they require only if they see justice is meted out to everyone equally.

I am sure that there are good many advisers in the Awami League and therefore the points mentioned above are already under consideration of the party.

> Amjad Hussain 72. Elephant Road Dhaka-1205

Lo the Editor...

Keep up the right spirit

Sir, Perhaps I voted for the other elegant lady recently, but it does not stop me from ex-claiming how refreshing it is to see Begum Motia Chowdhury and the Prime Minister wearing cool cotton deshi saris which are cheap and inexpensive (BTV news, June 25, '96). What a change it is from the 10,000-taka Jamdani saris of Begum Rowshan and 400-dollar printed French chiffon saris of the previous Prime Minister.

We hope the leaders will keep this up as we do not want to see them wallow in luxury or a beauty contest while most of us cannot afford two square meals a day. My thanks to the PM and her Minister for putting their first foot forward in the right di-

May good common sense keep them away from corrupting influences of

Lopa Khan Hanif House No .62, Road No. 8A Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209

Patuakhali Krishi College Sir, Recently on an official

assignment I visited the Patuakhali Krishi College (PKC); Dumki, Patuakhali. About 37 kms off Barisal. Although the location i.e.Dumki itself is a natural beauty surrounded by rivers, but it takes a long time to reach Patuakhali Agricu-Itural College campus because on the way there are two ferries, one on Kirtonkhola river and another on the river Paira. Since most of the time in a day only one ferry operates on each river, it takes a long time to cross the rivers. Hence

it is strongly felt that at least two ferries should be put into service in those four ferry

Meanwhile, I have noticed that the PKC has only a single direct telephone line connected to a 70 lines PABX Since the college is situated far away from the city, at least two more direct telephone lines should be given to PKC for maintaining external communications by the college administration.

M Zahidul Hague Assistant Professor Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka.