

Reassuring Words

Begum Khaleida Zia has said possibly the most awaited but hardly expected words. The nation stands reassured by her pledge of desisting from agitations that can hurt both our economy and our people. Although she qualified her assurance by a clause — without valid reasons — the spirit is unmistakably clear. Ever since the creation of BNP her party has been strumming unremittingly on what Khaleida has herself come to accept as her catch-phrase — politics of production and development. Every time she denounces the programmes of the '95 non-cooperation she binds herself to not taking the same line of protest. This promises a healthy political development. Let the two parties so build their politics that this nation isn't anymore required to make non-cooperation-style sacrifices in order to right political wrongs. The nation should now outlive the practice of shutting off the nation as an instrument of political pressure. Whatever the need or the provocation, the utilities must go on without let-up as would the economically important operations like production — garments for one.

Begum Zia's party is dangerously close to the precipice of embracing the alleged police and political harassment of BNP elements as one and the first of the valid reasons she has spoken about. Dangerous we say for two reasons. If the contention is made without enough of substantiation BNP will be losing greatly in credibility. And if this is taken as sufficiently valid reason for launching agitations that will hurt economy of the nation and people's life in general.

In the case of true harassment and victimisation — duly substantiated — we stand pledge-bound to give the cause of its elimination the best of press focus. The government's feared slide into political harassment will boomerang on the ruling party sapping much of the confidence it has already built up in the public mind. Eliminate the terrorists, try the killers of both August 15 and November 3, punish the corrupt — but never should you use these to further petty political ends or you will be harming yourself irreversibly, that is what the nation has to say to AL. If that bad thing at all comes off, Begum Zia can depend on a fair press giving her enough cushion in this issue.

For the moment, we shall take her words for a virtual truce — for cooperation, production and development as she loves to say.

Fine, But...

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has reiterated her government's commitment to the cause of press freedom. Asseverated earlier it was echoed again yesterday in the second annual conference of the Dhaka Reporters' Unity in which she spoke as the chief guest.

It is quite encouraging to note that the executive head of the country despite all the pressure and obligation related to the position has been able to remain focused on the necessity of a national policy for the proper growth of newspaper industry as a whole. Whatever she said on that day on issues like her government's policy of not using the quota of newsprint and advertisements as tools for clipping the freedom of newspapers as well as her disclosure of the plan to equip the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) in a manner so that it would always be a disseminating source of professionalism indicated a long-awaited shift to the right direction.

While it is too early and to some extent unjustified to make a value judgment of the present government's performance on its pledge for press freedom, it would not be too much to observe that accessibility to information leaves ample room for improvement. It appears that the sincerity and the professed political will of the party in power are yet to make inroads into our dated and static bureaucratic set-up. There can be so many explanations for this particular downer in an atmosphere virtually agog with expectations for dynamism and transparency in the industry.

The government functionaries must bear in mind that public right to information, barring of course of a very few classified areas, is *sine qua non* for press freedom. Once this is turned into a culture, words in favour of press freedom will no longer be mere words but real actions.

How Long?

Hers is not a case of voluntary escape from life to oblivion out of an overwhelming sense of grief over the untimely death of any favourite film star. Ne-trakona's Monowara, a collage student has committed suicide out of shame, the shame of her failure to maintain the freedom of her mind and body.

Monowara had to pay the ultimate price in life because she did not allow two of her fellow villagers to satisfy their carnal desire on her. Unable to fulfil their lust they let loose a known terrorist of the area on her who raped her maybe just for the kick of it or for monetary obligation of a hired criminal.

No, no policeman or local social worker has revealed this. Monowara herself wrote three letters including one to the Union Parishad (UP) chairman in which she identified the men behind the ultimate insult of her womanhood and death. What Monowara did was not a sentimental scribbling before death by choice but give a slap right across the face of a society that so assiduously had taught her ethics, honour and so many ideas in the same vein without either possessing or instilling in anyone the strength to defend oneself.

Monowara's death shows that it is about time the government implemented punitive measures of exemplary effect and intensity in cases of violation of women. Death penalty in the conviction of acid throwing cases went a long way in curbing the rate of occurrence of a crime that once increased in a monstrous proportion. The confirmed believers in the relative physical weakness of women do need to see the hanging bodies of one or two of their 'peers' to feel the necessity of restraint.

In Lieu of an Apologia: PM Faces People after 100 Days

A lot of the effectiveness of the programme was lost largely due to the ham-handed approach of the organizers. Some of the questions were long on flattery and short on substance

It is not an apology, less so defence. I refer to the Prime Minister's talk-show of October 1. The extraordinary level of reactions from media — constructive, critical, warts and all — on the programme 'Shab-nay Jigayasha' give us one conclusion: Civil society in Bangladesh is gaining ground. So two cheers for democracy — one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. But risking to err on the side of caution, I venture to suggest that some of us overreacted. We tended to exaggerate.

Television is an institution in the country like any other. It has grown and developed the way the past governments wanted it to be. President Zia's 98 per cent vote casting was happily telecast by BTV. There are many instances in the 80s when BTV was required to put on air programmes and news not commensurate with what exactly happened. People's experience between 1991-1996

for transparency and accountability, the very soul of democracy and democratic values. But the appraisal and set-up or artificial. President Reagan in a breakfast-prayer meeting at the Washington Hilton amused us all with a story about democracy in the US and the then Soviet Union. The story was like this: The heckler in front of the House wanted President Reagan to quit because he failed to many of his election pledges. The heckler in front of the House of Communism and another hundred years of the golden rule of Soviet Communism under Communist leadership!

Prime Minister's current account of her government's first 100 days. With the list, she touched on such achievements as amendment

visits to Saudi Arabia and PRC will further consolidate our friendly bilateral relations.

In an imperfect world democratic governments also are not perfect. Even the Greek city states could not claim perfection. But they left a golden tradition however imperfect it might have been.

For us in Bangladesh, therefore, the TV meet-the-people programme of the Prime Minister was extraordinary. The Prime Minister's intellectual bent of mind was clearly discernible. She was spontaneous and natural. Eager to answer the questions. I was at a dinner with the visiting US Congressman Don Johnson and USIS Chief Donald Bishop. Don Johnson is in Dhaka in connection with the on going parliamentary workshop. They were both impressed with the spontaneity of the Prime Minister in answering the questions. The heart of the matter is trans-

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



February 15 is something that one would rather not reminisce. BTV merrily put out the Mirpur election, the Magura tragedy and February 15 Psycho-drama. Jagannath Hall was attacked and innocent students were savaged by the police on January 30 night — BTV blithely ignored it.

The government has changed after June 12 election; the BTV behemoth has not. It has to be excoriated of the past ghost — the ghost of undemocratic culture. Lot more efforts will be necessary, I guess. Rousseau in his Confessions tells us something very relevant — "everything is radically connected with politics and however one proceeds, no people would be other than the nature of its government made it." I am sure all such future programmes will be interesting and truly reflecting the democratic spirit — and thus transparent and accountable.

To mark One Hundred Days of the assumption of the office, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wanted to meet the people and answer questions directly from a cross-section of the audience/listeners. In itself it was a revolutionising step in the context of Bangladesh, of course.

In other democratic countries like the US, Japan, UK, Italy or France or neighboring India, facing the people by the Chief Executives is only a part of their routine — and nothing exceptional. Presidents and Prime Ministers must be evaluated, appraised or criticized — that is an *a priori* condition

of the Rules of Business, tampering with terrorism and mastanism, war against corruption and bureaucratic malfeasance (submissiveness of financial disclosure of the Cabinet Ministers and Administrative Reforms Commission), restructuring agriculture, creating conditions for DFI (over a billion US dollars already pledged and more in the pipeline), equitable sharing of Ganges waters, giving unruffled power to industry and the general consensus, de-politicising bureaucracy and administration (appointments to be made purely and essentially on merit, ability, efficiency and integrity. In the fence Services the process of promotion should be on the basis of merit and not on the basis of the salutory impact. The trial of the murderers of Bangabandhu will be held. And above all Prime Minister assured the country that the leader of the opposition would be invited to avail of such an opportunity if she would desire. (The nation has not forgotten that the former Prime Minister withdrew from a debate on the June 12 election much to the dismay of the electorate). One will accept the invitation for herself and not for any ersatz leadership. She is the leader of the party and she must face the people.

The Prime Minister also formed the nation that Ja has renewed her offer of \$ 500 million for upgrading the C tagong Airport. (Japan withdrew this offer in the last day of BNP). On foreign policy —

parency.

But a lot of the effectiveness of the programme was lost largely due to the ham-handed approach of the organizers. Some of the questions were long on flattery and short on substance. Those who have seen talk shows — David Frost-Dimbleby, Larry King Live or Aap-ki-Adalat vintage — would immediately know that a lot could be improved. The Prime Minister was clearly displeased that phone-questions were given less importance. One could hear the PM asking for questions on telephones! She also asked for questions from ladies.

One has to understand clearly that this Prime Minister does not need flattery and gratuitous platitudes. Nor does she need time-servers around her. She has assumed charge of office after a long and arduous struggle of 21 years — the democratic struggle following the brutal murder of the father of the nation. She has learnt the art of politics through experience, through sufferings of the worst kind. She has a sense of the tragic — therefore, a sense of greater responsiveness to the need of the people.

If we forget this, we may not do justice to Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister. While we are celebrating the nation's Silver Jubilee, we need true reflection of her leadership, her sense of history, for our survival through the renewal and re-education of the spirit of the War of Liberation.

To the Editor...

An appeal to law enforcing agency

Sir, The worst kind of business is the one that corrupts the minds of the young and perverts their moral values. Today I write with great sorrow, anxiety and distaste. Nowadays I've noticed a class of businessmen and street hawkers (clearly with no ethical values or moral background) have started a business of selling magazines and booklets containing obscene pictures. These booklets are commonly known as "choft". The best place to acquire such a filthy book is Nilkhet. And as many educational institutions are situated over there, school children and college students always roam around in that area. As a result, they have gradually turned into the best customers. It causes me to fret helplessly to realise that children as young as a sixth-grader may well be exposed to such magazines. And these are very easily accessible, anyone can get them if they want to as the sellers do not care about any age-limit. The sale takes place in such an open manner that there is no way the authorities could not be aware of their existence. They are displayed in open and broad daylight, and often causes passers-by plenty of embarrassment, especially those who are accompanied by children are usually become most embarrassed. This culture and business is spreading like a plague today and this should immediately be stopped. Otherwise, tomorrow it may be your child hovering around stalls at Nilkhet. Think about it.

A Well-wisher
Dhaka

Induction of tribal people in the Cabinet

Sir, We came to learn from the newspapers that the Cabinet is going to be expanded soon for better functioning of the government. The aim is to lessen the burden of those ministers who are holding more than one or two portfolios. Now it is up to the Prime Minister to choose who will be inducted in the Cabinet.

In this connection we like to say that there is a good number of tribal people living in Chittagong Hill Tracts and other places of the country. They are known as: Chakmas, Moghs, Jumas, Rohinghas, Marmas, Larmas, Tipperas. Santhals etc. They are the citizens of

Bangladesh by birth. They are residing in this country, many generations. They have made remarkable contribution to our liberation war. Many of them gave food and shelter to freedom fighters during the war.

They are mostly Buddhists by religion. Buddhists are not to Herdus in respect of population. Many of them are highly educated. They were not included in the Cabinet by the erstwhile government. So, it is our suggestion that they should be included in the Cabinet. This will help enable to control the tribal insurgents of CHT too. We hope our Prime Minister will look into the matter and take necessary steps in this regard.

A M Kais Choudhury
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Importing electricity

Sir, We abhor statements and counter statements of BNP and Awami League in respect of importing electricity from India. This is a total wastage of time and energy which will further aggravate the sufferings of the people.

The newly elected Awami League government first blamed the BNP government for past ills of last five years in this country but now the former is accusing all the past governments of last 21 years for the same.

Criticism and counter criticism do not help mitigate the sufferings of the people but it definitely helps us to arrive at a right decision.

So what should be the right decision of ours? We should stop the system-loss, develop our own power generating capacity, build up plants in the private sector and meet our domestic requirements.

Would the Awami League government which claims to be a 'consensus government' kindly help all concerned to arrive at a consensus on the above decision/recommendation and move in the right direction in the national interest?

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The same old song

Sir, After our liberation the then Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said that he would not able give anything to the nation for at least three years. He urged the nation to be patient. He further said that the

residue of the misrule, exploitation and oppression of the Pakistanis could not be removed overnight. The nation believed him and kept themselves patient for more than three years. But what late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered afterwards was nothing but autocracy in its purest form — in the style of one-party system of BKSAL. During that darkest era of the history of this nation, thousands of people were killed by various private forces of the then ruling party. Inevitably that government was ousted through a military coup on the 15th August, 1975. Now, after long 21 years the AL has come back to power through 12th June's general election. The present Prime Minister has started singing the same old song that was sung by her late father. Now she is telling us to be patient, that garbage of last 21 years cannot be removed overnight.

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Inspiring!
Sir, On September 6, 1996 — in your Star Weekend Magazine's 'Women on the Move' section, there appeared a very interesting article on Ms. Anela Haque. This was excellent to see such an enterprising and creative woman, and I was greatly inspired. Please let me know how I can get in touch with Ms. Haque. Thank you very much.

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BCS cadre for agricultural engineers

Sir, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh has a reputation as the highest centre for agricultural learning in this country. Amongst its six faculties, faculty of Agricultural Engineering and Technology has been awarding engineering degree in agriculture since its establishment. You will be disappointed to know that despite an agriculture-based country and having a scope to pay vital roles, graduates of this discipline are not being properly utilised for the country's development. An agricultural engineer is skillfully capable of irrigation and drainage purposes, mechanisation of agricultural sector through implementation of modern techniques, crop diversification, construction of farm structures and preservation of grains etc. They have no suitable alternatives in this regard.

However, it's a matter of great regret that so far no steps have been taken to accommodate them with employment and for their professional recognition.

During the rule of past government a student movement was started to press home their demand for an independent BSC Cadre Service authorities concerned. The then government realised the importance of agricultural engineering BSC

Cadre and gave assurance to do the needful. But unfortunately their commitment was never materialised.

We are happy that present government has given special emphasis and top priority to the agricultural sector for national development. Keeping the agricultural engineers unemployed and giving them no opportunities, no progress can be achieved.

So, my earnest appeal to the government is to establish an independent BCS (Agricultural Engineering) Cadre as soon as possible.

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The Indian Power Scenario

by KZ Islam

My personal impression after talking to senior officials was that with proper approach at appropriate level it should not be too much of a problem for India to spare 2 to 3 hundred MW of power for Bangladesh.

I attended a 3-day seminar in New Delhi last week entitled: **INDIA POWER 2000 AD and BEYOND.** There was a galaxy of speakers and among the participants who were senior executives from major power generation, transmission and independent power promotion companies. The chief guest in the inaugural session was Dr. S. Venugopalachari, Minister for Power Senior government officials of the Ministry of Power were also present Mr. D.V. Kapur, former Power Secretary in his keynote address highlighted the problems confronting the power sector in India. When the floor was given to the participants, I pointed out to the Minister that on that very day there was a high level government delegation from Bangladesh in New Delhi discussing the prospects of exporting power from India to Bangladesh. I inquired from the Minister whether it was possible for India to spare power in view of their own power problems. The Minister at the open forum clarified the position and stated that dialogue has been continuing in this regard for the last two years between the two governments. He further stated that although there was power shortage in some parts of India, there was surplus power in the northeast region due to the absence of transmission facilities to evacuate the available power. There is a 500 MW Thermal Power Station near Farakka and due to insufficient demand one of the turbines is kept idle. From further discussions with the government participants, I ascertained that India has offered power to Bangladesh at the off-peak hours. My personal impression after talking to senior officials was that with proper approach at appropriate level it should not be too much of a problem for India to spare 2 to 3 hundred MW of power for Bangladesh.

The Indian Power Demand-Supply Status

The installed capacity increased from 5654 MW in 1961 to nearly 83.00 MW by mid 1996 and is planned to be increased to 144,000 MW by 2002 and 207,842 MW by the year 2007. The primary power resources in India are Hydro power, Fossil fuel-Coil, Lignite, Natural gas and Nuclear power. Presently the main energy resource is coal as it accounts for approximately 60 per cent of the total power produced and would continue to remain as the basic fuel even during the forthcoming period. The next resource is hydro-electricity accounting for just under 25 per cent.

The implementation of the planned capacity additions programme is grossly out of step with the sharply increasing demand for power. At the end of March 1997 the energy shortage is expected to be about 30 per cent and the peaking deficit would be of the order of 15 per cent considering a capacity addition of 20,000 MW. With the actual additions likely to fall well short of the target the deficits can be expected to be only higher. Notwithstanding the fact that the capacity additions programme of the country has been growing at an annual compounded rate of about 10 per cent over the past several years. This rate has sharply declined to less than 5 per cent over the last two years, particularly during the introduction of the private power generation. Although dozens of MoUs have been signed till date the actual progress on the ground has been minuscule. The seminar tried to identify the reasons behind the slow progress of the implementation of the power projects. The major impediments are:

i) **Bureaucratic Bottlenecks:** Investor interest in the power sector and the list of MoU signed projects was steadily growing till the government decided to halt the MoU route and introduced competitive bidding. The reality is that the investment initiatives were frustrated by the bureaucratic process and the need for obtaining consents from myriad agencies. In fact there seems to be no road map available of all the clearances that are required. The general consensus was the need for one Regulatory body with statutory powers like the Supreme Court.

ii) **Fuel:** Considerable confusion was created by first allowing Naptha as the fuel then suddenly withdrawing this facility when it was discovered about the insufficient availability of this fuel. Since coal is likely to be the main fuel for power plants, India will require a huge investment in mining and transportation of coal. This treads on the development of infrastructure on a colossal scale with environmental implications.

iii) **Multistate Power Project:** The fuel being in one state and the power plant being in another creates a problem of coordination.

iv) **SEB (State Electricity Boards):** On the issue of investor concerns, the gravest issue is the poor financial health of the SEBs that raises doubts about the ability of a majority of SEBs to pay for power purchased from private power projects.

v) **Privatisation of Distribution:** It was generally agreed that a very effective way to reorganise the power sector would be to grant licenses for power distribution. This would

enhance the financial capability of the SEBs to pay for power. Because of a maze of obstacles to the 250 proposed projects that would provide an additional 100,000 MW of desperately needed power, only one has received permission to start operation. Players such as ENRON, AES and COGENTRIX are entangled in India's political web.

The ORISSA Reforms

In the deliberations of the seminar the example of ORISSA came up repeatedly. Last April, it dissolved the state Electricity Board and replaced it with an independent regulatory commission. Under the new system, power project approvals formerly dependent on the capricious and bureaucratic SEBs are instead screened by the commission whose members are less vulnerable to political pressure. They set tariffs, grant licenses, conduct competitive procurement bids and monitor performance standards. Privatisation is a central part of the strategy. The old monopolies, generation, transmission and distribution functions have been broken up into separate corporate units. The Orissa reforms seem to be the talk of the town and other states are looking at it with a view to replicating it.

India Scraps 2-part Tariff

The Government of India has decided to do away with the two-part tariff system for Independent Power Promoters (IPPs). The new tariff policy being finalised by the power ministry envisages competitive bidding based on the tariff for sale of electricity to SEBs. The present two-part tariff comprises recovery of: i) Annual fixed charges and ii) Variable charges. The government has decided to adopt a standard practice specifying a single rate at which private investors are asked to sell power.

It was an enlightening experience sitting through the 3-day Conference particularly hearing the Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda at the valedictory session. His modest bearing impressed all the participants. I feel that Indian power experience is very relevant to Bangladesh and our authorities should closely monitor the developments. Our government would do well to look at the Orissa reforms. The fundamental lesson is that if any progress is to be made in the power sector policies must be insulated from electricity!

The writer is Managing Director, Nirman International Limited.

OPINION

Who Buries Dead Dogs?

Nazim Farhan Choudhury

On the long drive from Chittagong the other day, I noticed numerous dead dogs on the road. No doubt the victims of the rickshawala truck drivers we have in 100 kmphs-hour missiles. The sight of the otherwise uneventful journey, I wondered who actually buries these dogs? Is there someone assigned for the work or do we let mother Nature take her course? Thinking seriously, the repetitive answer that kept going through my mind is that we Bengalees are not used to burying things.

What, the respected readers may ask, are the overflowing Azimur and Banani sites being doing over the years?

Well, my answer to that is that though we bury our loved ones physically, their spirits are never let to rest. That is, what many would argue, makes us a humane society. But my argument is that if it stands in the way of progress, is it not to our interest that we let the past rest in peace? If the dead dogs were given the respect of a burial it would be to our common benefit. The dog would have peaceful eternal rest while we would have had a smoother journey to Dhaka.

Of late the nation is going through the process of soul-searching. We are now looking at our history with a new thirst for knowledge and trying to relive the past once again. The days of our glory when the nation was united against the unjust rule by foreign concerns. And we try to live in the days when the young nation tried with some (albeit little) success to find its place in the economic sun. Our position in the socio-political arena is nowadays governed by who we believe are the greatest of our past leaders. Mind you not of what we think their legacy stands for today. All the political beings in the country are reflecting back to 'eras' when they had some sort of positive contribution to the Bangalee society. Well many a times the past is also twisted, contorted and distorted beyond recognition. Why one elusively biased group who tried its best with some of the most inhumane brutality to resist independence of the Bengalees, are now claiming that they had actually supported the effort?

I was born during the War. My generation and the ones after mine are now asking the same questions. We would like to know the honest to God account of our history. We are intrigued with the essence of our being. Very very unfortunate for us that our elders cannot see beyond their petty differences to let us also learn the lessons of history. I would tend to believe

the maturity of a race comes with the acceptance of their past mistakes and taking steps to rectify them. The Germans have come to terms with the Genocide, the Americans with their role in the creation of the Red Indian population, the Japanese true to their humble nature have publicly apologised to their Asian neighbours for their atrocities. We, while claiming to know the past, believing in the fact we live to glorify it, we fall miserably even to learn from it.

Bob Dole in the recently San Diego Republican Party Conference, opened himself to the American nation as a 'Bridge to the Past'. In Chicago the hopeful Democrat Presidential candidate to the 2000 race, Al Gore, retorted that it was not at the past that America should look but to the vision of the next century. With that the Clinton-Gore team so extended its lead in the polls, the Republicans, to all probability, will suffer one of the worst defeats in their history, and that too, to an incumbent who headed what political pundits has written off as an one term administration.

Americans have figured it out that no matter how glorious their past was, it is the future which holds the key to its prosperity. They are now fighting the war of new types, of wars of new battlefields. No longer the charge to take Hitler's Berlin bunkers that counts, it is now the conquest of Mao's Beijing markets. The world is gearing itself for a new set of rules to play the nation game. It is educating its citizens to be the front line soldiers in the battle of the economies. What are we doing in the meantime? We are living in the rhetoric of the past.

Our political beings are too caught up in the happenings of the past to remember to even live in the present, let alone think of the future. Foresight is not in any of their dictionaries. Are they not even a bit interested in coming out of their father's/husband's shadows? Do they not believe that it is they who now have the power to shape a nation? History that they love will remember them only if they give it a reason. Leave your own mark I tell them and I am sure 120 million people will echo my thoughts. It is indeed a future different from our past that we are moving towards. We need new ideas and new light. We do not need to hear the same speeches that my grandparents heard. And most of all we do not need to fight about the past. It is time now that Bangladesh starts building leaders of the future.