

Stormbound Pakistan

With barely two weeks to go before the general elections, Pakistan's chronic connection with violence has undergone a fearful revival in Saturday's bomb explosion that left 26 killed and a hundred injured.

Although reports are yet to confirm a Shia connection, the involvement of some members of the minority group in a predominantly Sunni Pakistan is being widely suspected.

The trouble with Pakistan in the case of any violent outbreak is that it cannot wait to be dealt by the law of the land. Backlashes, often of a deadlier intensity may make a real mess of the situation. The bomb explosion outside the Lahore Sessions Court is already reported to have triggered a retaliation. Loyalists of Zia-ur-Rahman Farooqi, the Sipah-e-Sahabah leader killed in the blast are reported to have burnt down the campaign centre of Farooqi's rival — a Shia — in the upcoming elections. Keeping in mind the highly inflammable socio-political milieu of Pakistan we hope vengeance is limited to this and does not go out of hand, jeopardising Pakistan's much disrupted quest for democracy. With the elections around the corner, the authorities in Pakistan have showed a very welcome understanding of the gravity of the situation and have put security on red alert.

All these governmental responses, however, lead to a rather ironic and pitiable realisation of the political crisis Pakistan has come to live with since its birth. Much of the trials and tribulations that part of the sub-continent has been going through have stemmed from its politicians' failure to get a pluralistic political system in place. Time and again the party or individuals at the helm have used religion to perpetuate its hold on power and subsequently defeated the cause of democracy. In the fifty-year history of the country it never mattered whether the rulers were from the cantonment or from the civilians. The pattern has always been the same. The accent on religious zealotry has left Pakistan as a virtual battlefield. And undaunted by the home lessons, Pakistani rulers have indulged in either supporting or exporting Islamic militancy in the region. Indeed, today's Pakistan is a tragedy of the failure of its leaders and politicians.

Resistance to Defaulters

President Shahabuddin has called for social resistance against bank-loan defaulters. The present generation doesn't know what social resistance is like. While other expressions of mass intolerance grow, the society has strangely become tolerant of all social and economic and even criminally aberrant persons. The society has somehow been rid of one of its most effective defence mechanisms — social resistance.

Heeding President Shahabuddin's call may bring this wonderful social weapon back into play. And this time it should be easy for the persons to be socially ostracised, as they are eminently identifiable people. For the first few decades of this century constituents of the police cadre faced social resistance. This was replaced by an apathy towards contractors — the class that got to riches almost overnight and coming from nowhere. This was as unfair as unfair can be. But this represented reaction of a society in its need to protect its values and the tested mechanisms of social dynamics. The boycott of the bank-loan defaulters wouldn't entail the unfairness of earlier such social actions.

And what would it entail? We do have a suggestion here. The government must show the way as to how to do the resistance. Are there CIPs among the defaulters? Straightaway withdraw this privilege. Stop inviting them to state and all official functions and formal occasions. Disqualify them from chamber politics by declared government policy. Ordinary law-abiding people do not have any chance of mixing with the defaulters who are among the richest in the society and as such are also among the most powerful — to be able to deny them social intercourse. The defaulters' social clout is a result of their winning ways with the government. Let the government deny them these first, it will be easy for the society to follow suit. Before these materialise, let the government leaders start practising boycott of these defaulters in everything out of office. Ordinarily, there can be no question of small people boycotting such big ones. Even then they will do so if the way is shown by more substantial people.

Fertiliser under Card System

The introduction of card system for sale of fertiliser demands attention from all. Although it will be introduced as an experimentation, enough thought has gone into the upcoming system but a lot will depend on its successful implementation. On the face it, the system looks quite sound, for fertiliser is being an exclusive commodity that no one other than a farmer will be able to buy under the arrangement. The argument that farmers will be allowed to buy only the required quantity of fertiliser — the quantity determined by the size of land under tillage — is also very sound.

There is no reason why this system should not prove effective, if, of course, everything goes according to the plan. One caution though — initially introduced in two thanas, the management of the system may be easier under a watchful eye. Spread across the country under varying conditions, things may be different. This is, however, not to say that the system will show flaws not noticed in an experimental situation. It only shows that there is a need for a close monitoring and supervision of the management.

It is precisely at this point we would like to know how the share-croppers, who have no land to show, will be able to purchase fertiliser under the system. Then, again, how the farmers, who have land but do not cultivate themselves, will be barred from buying fertiliser and reselling it at a higher price? If these questions can be adequately answered, we think this will be a move in the right direction.

The President's Address to the Parliament

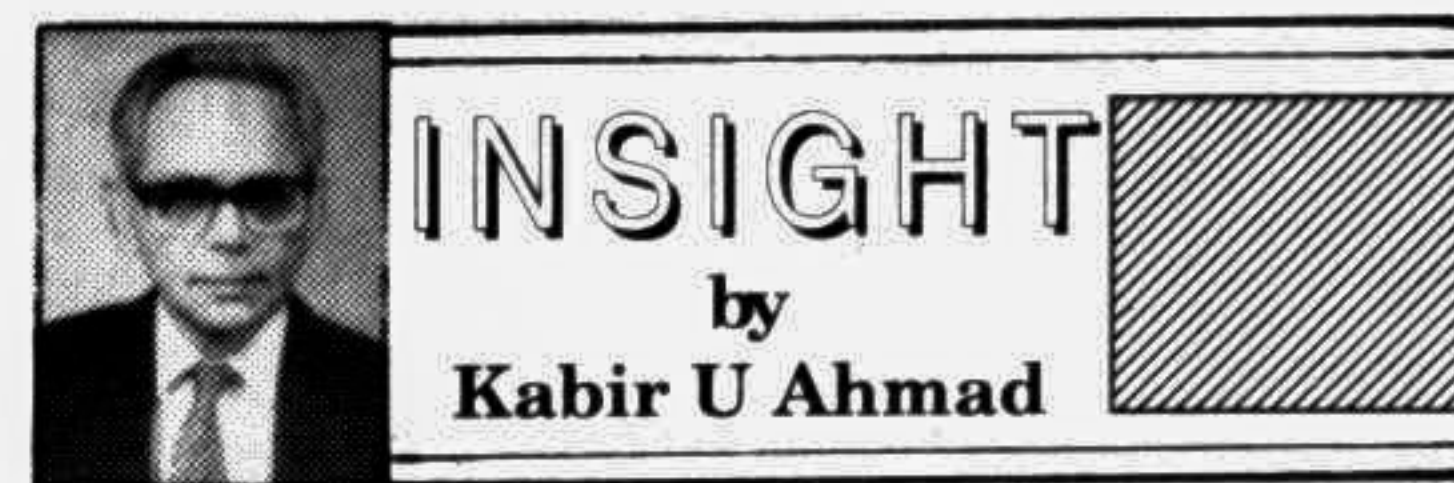
The President has underscored the need for united action when he said 'The whole nation is eagerly looking at this Parliament.....I sincerely believe, this House would lead the nation to face the challenges of the 21st century and materialise the dream of a Sonar Bangla.'

A democratic system, and all decisions affecting the life of the nation have to be passed in the Parliament with the participation of both the treasury and the opposition bench members. Any neglect of this duty amounts to violation of the basic norms of parliamentary system. What is worrying, however, is to see that the prolonged boycott of Parliament, for whatever reasons, is gradually becoming the norm of parliamentary practice in this country which portends a disaster for democracy. Apart from moral suasion and appeal, something more legal has to be instituted in the parliamentary statutes to prevent the recurrence of such behaviour in the future. Otherwise, one can forget about democracy in the country. Hopefully, it would not be considered impertinence if one suggests that the President should take an initiative to settle this issue once and for all.

One must also remember from the history of this country from 1947 onwards, how the reckless behaviours of politicians in 1950s provided justifications for military take over and what a prolonged period of resistance and fight the students and youths of the country has to put up to overthrow the military regime of Pakistan. Bangladesh had its own share of military dictatorship with its destructive effects on the economy and the stability of

the country. Twenty-five years have passed without any spurt of economic growth and any improvement in the life of the poverty-stricken people which everyone renders lip-service to. If one wants to see any substantial progress in the economy, politics has to be clean, fair and above board. Myopia and selfishness of both politicians and the army have to be resisted at all costs. This imposes a critical role upon the politicians in running the

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INSIGHT
by
Kabir U Ahmad

country. Any excess from either side will plunge the country into the old Aristotelian cycle of dictatorship and democracy which is a sure recipe for the destruction. If this happens, which one has seen happening over the last twenty-five years, one can forget about all the dreams of "Sonar Bangla."

Facing the Twenty-first Century Unitedly

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"Default" Culture

The President has rightly drawn attention to the vast amount of unpaid bank loans inherited from the profligate period of 1980s. He has mentioned about Tk 12,600 crore now, but it was quoted at about Tk 4,000 crore in the newspapers until two years ago. Whatever the amount outstanding now, it is a colossal amount for Bangladesh and, what is worse, it has crippled the entire financial sector which is almost on the precipice now. Some of the banks would have gone bankrupt long ago had the government not infused fresh capital into it. How long can it keep doing it? Who eventually pays for keeping these banks surviving? Who benefits by these measures? Eventually, everything is borne by the poor tax-payers of country. Is this justice?

Terrorism and Law and Order

What the President, however, has not touched on is the problem of terrorism and law and order. If one reads the newspapers, one finds that terrorism, armed robbery, and mafia activities have been increasing over the last six months or so. No one knows how many more are committed in the country and go unreported. No one has any qualm about someone's moneybag be-

ing snatched by a musclemen or a gun-toter, someone's car being smashed on the road, a girl being raped by uncontrolled youths, and businessman being shot and robbed etc.

These are just daily statistics to the readers until it happens to them. However, the lesson from all these is that the law and order is almost breaking down in the country and reports have it that behind every terrorist group there is support from powerful people at the top. The process of criminalisation of the society is reaching a point of climax. The society will not be livable after some time. The question, however, that everyone should ask is whether it is meaningful to talk of economic development and fulfilment of dreams etc., allowing such violent criminalisation process unchecked? What does one mean by development? Is providing food, clothes and shelter to substantial number of people roaming around with guns and poisons mean economic development? If the state cannot provide the basic security of life and property to innocent individuals, then what is the purpose of having economic development? The real danger to the very foundation of the society is coming from this criminalisation process. The society seems to be seized within by its own gangsters and their political supporters. Hopefully, it wouldn't be considered impertinence if one suggests that the President should start a serious negotiation with all the major political parties on controlling these evil forces in the society.

Idle Thoughts: The Evolution of Political Slogans

Political slogans in this part of the sub-continent have been observed to have assumed detestable proportions. Sometimes, they have transcended the boundaries of decency and decorum. Side by side, there are palpable efforts to make them rhythmic, no matter if they carry any meaning at all or not, writes Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

Reverting to the political slogan chapter in the context of Indian sub-continent, we may have a look at the specimens obtaining in early 20th century. This was the period when the people here started realising the bitter pangs of discrimination meted out to them by the British masters. At such a juncture the urge for independence started gaining momentum. Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi — yet to be known as Mahatma Gandhi — was then in South Africa. There he used to live in utter anguish witnessing blatant disregard of human rights and the state of serfdom of the black Africans and many immigrants from India. His young mind revolted within and subsequently he voiced his protest against the racial discrimination of the Britishers. Gandhi was equally distressed and disturbed at the reports of similar predatory treatment of the people of India by the British regime. Since he could not make any organised protest in South Africa in the face of a very strong resistance by the men in power, Gandhi returned to India.

Gandhiji was a die-hard proponent of non-violence which remained his political philosophy till 30th January, 1950 when he laid down his life to the assassin's bullet. Gandhi's appearance on the Indian scenario eventually served as a morale booster to the otherwise disorganised and half-hearted political activities in the sub-continent. The Indian National Congress saw its emergence at such an hour. Manned mostly by Hindus, the Muslims of India initially hesitated to join hands with Congress. Sooner they realized that nothing positive could be achieved in isolation and at one stage some of the eminent Muslim leaders of the time joined the Indian Congress to strengthen the ouster movement against the British. Parallel to it some of them spearheaded the Khilafat movement in the twenties. The main objective remaining the same to secure freedom from the British rule, the two worked together for some time. But, the element of mutual doubt did not recede palpably. Consequently, some of the Muslim leaders started serious thinking of a separate organisation to retain Muslim independent identity. A close examination of such a feature revealed later that the desired unity of purpose was subtly sabotaged by the intriguing policy of 'divide and rule' of the British masters.

However, the political activities assumed a boiling proportion. At this time and even afterwards, the air was charged with a number of motivational slogans to rouse people's passion for independence. In order

to express hatred against British imperialism and also not to sound too much aggressive, a softer slogan like: 'Shun foreign goods, use local ones' was used. The rulers got the message and soon started tightening their reins followed by numerous inhibitory orders to nip the movement in the bud.

Still then, the movement continued unabated. This was the time when some of the political leaders who doubted in Gandhiji's policy of non-violence, thought in terms of destabilizing the administration turning to militant activities, and armed resistance. Though they were branded as 'terrorists' by the British rulers, and their local henchmen, the men taking to arms had been able to carve their names in the annals of history as true patriots and heroes of national independence. Following this episode Surya Sen of Chittagong led an abortive attempt at securing arms from the local armoury which was branded as a robbery by the erstwhile administration. Subsequently, he was hanged to death while some more were killed during the encounter. And away in western Bengal another famous militant, Khudiram, was hauled and hanged by the Britishers. To make his death memorable a song 'Ekbar bidai de me garbe' was composed. 'hashi hashi garbe, fanchi dekhbe jagat bashi' reed in the air. Even to this day this immortal lyrical slogan epitomizes the deepest urge for freedom sending the posterity to wonder and amazement.

This and the tragic brush-firing at Jalianwallabag besides many other sporadic incidences of ruthless suppression of the people gave the total movement for freedom a newer dimension rocking the entire British empire.

The inevitable slogan of 'Quit India' sooner assumed a very strong colour and inspiration to the people across the whole sub-continent. Coming by the heels was another motivating slogan: 'Down with British imperialism' which added to the numerous calls before, to bolster the freedom movement. Around the same period, the most powerful writing of the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam gave newer momentum to the ever mounting agitational programmes against British Raj. In protest against the arrests of the anti-British political activists in large numbers every day, Nazrul boomed with his immortal songs 'Karar oi lauto kapat, bhangey fak kar leyo kout.....' and 'oi shikol para chha.....'. The thought-provoking message of these and many other songs composed by the rebel poet reached all those then behind bars inspiring them to take fresher vows to root out British imperialism from the Indian sub-continent. And those moving freely were equally rejuvenated by the invigorating elixir of life as it were, irrespective of age.

Nazrul's mighty pen upheld not only the people's right to freedom but also crusaded against all kinds of social, political, economic and racial discrimination. To rouse the younger generation at all times his musical slogan 'Chal...chal...chal, urdha gagonay baazey madol...' has been an integral part of the political slogans during British time. Even during the War of Liberation in 1971 this rhythmic song provided a unique source of inspiration to the Freedom Fighters when they used to be in parades.

Back again to the days when the whole sub-continent was in ever mounting political turmoil, the slogan of 'Bande

Mataram' — derived from Bankim Chandra's poem — used to unnerv the Britishers. Being of Sanskrit origin it was described by the British administration as out and out a Hindu religious representation. Muslims' acceptance of such a slogan would tantamount to blatant sacrilege of Islam. Such interpretation, though absolutely preposterous, found favour with some members of the Muslim leadership. It came off at such an hour when total allegiance to the Indian National Congress by the Muslims was already sabotaged. Thus, Muslim League — a hundred per cent Muslim political organization — was born in Dhaka in 1906 at the initiative of Nawab Salimullah Khan. By and large, Muslim League was able to muster support of landlords and zamindars belonging to the Muslim community. Though it became eventually an independent platform for the Muslims of India to achieve freedom, there ensued frequent clashes in the approach, with ICC, Khilafat Movement and other nationalist forces. These benefited the Britishers for sometime.

In 1940, the historic Lahore Conference at the behest of the Muslim League and a few other religion-based parties adopted the 'Pakistan' resolution — a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. Parallel to ICC's 'Quit India' slogan, the Muslim League, headed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, emerged with a new slogan 'Ladke lengey Pakistan' in 1946. Prior to this period, around 1943, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose formed his 'Azad Hind Fouz' to oust the Britishers from India. He did not have any faith in Gandhi's non-violence. This was the time when the Japanese invaded Burma, Malaysia, Thailand and even bombarded some places of India. Netaji sought Japanese help and later started lobbying with Germany which was already at war with the allied forces in Europe. The musical slogan that roused the recruits to the Azad Hind Fouz among others, was 'Door hato, door hato, door hato bhai duniya walo, Hindustan hamara hai.....' Subhas Bose lost his life, reportedly in a plane crash and, consequently, his Azad Hind Fouz disbanded. 'Inquilab Zindabad' was also a popular slogan at this hour.

However, the Britishers were compelled to grant independence in August 1947 on the basis of Hindu-Muslim majority population. Thus two separate states were born — India and Pakistan. The latter again in two separate parts — East and West Pakistan, between them a thousand miles of Indian territory.

Though we in East Pakistan were in majority, we were ruled by West Pakistan and twenty-five years of such rule was a period of utter deprivation and discrimination. Despite massive victory of Awami League in the general election of 1970, Sheikh Mujib was not allowed to form government. The War of Liberation in 1971 thus became an inevitable reality. The slogan was 'Joi Bangla' — as if an elixir of life for the millions who pledged down their lives at the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 7, 1971: 'Ebarer sangram amader muktit sangram, ebarer sangram swadhinatar sangram'.

The task of sustaining freedom went to the hands of such people after August 15, 1975, who perhaps scarcely believed in an independent Bangladesh. So the Pakistani lackeys must have found it easier to join hands with 'Joi Bangla' the most energising slogan that used to terrify the Pakistani gunmen, was soon replaced by

'Bangladesh Zindabad'. The antagonists considered 'Joi Bangla' as a product of alien culture.

Over the past two decades, political slogans have sustained noticeable changes in character and approach. They have been more or less personalized these days, such as '.....tumi egiye chalo, amra achhi tomar shathey', 'Joi Bangabandhu', 'Shaheed Zia, amor hoke', '.....dui bhai aek rashitey

OPINION

"Looking at Bangladesh"

Waseem Ahmed

I read the article, appearing in The Daily Star on January 17, 1997, 'Looking at Bangladesh' by Mr Kuldip Nayar, writing from New Delhi, with interest but could not help feeling that Mr Nayar may be slightly oblivious of the truth and in particular the psyche of the people of Bangladesh. At the very outset, let me clarify that I am totally apolitical and have no leanings whatsoever to any political party in Bangladesh simply because none of them espouse the interest and aspirations of the people of the country.

Let me start with the 'General Mistrust of the Indians' by Bangladeshis and how it has become deep-rooted. Right after the liberation of Bangladesh, the Indian army was seen involved in transporting huge quantities of arms and ammunition, furniture and fixtures, machinery of industries left behind by the Pakistanis and including railway bogies to India. There are some recorded incidences where some Bangladeshi army personnel tried to stop this pillage and had armed clashes with the Indian army in many parts of the country. These soldiers were later seriously rebuked by the then government and in some cases, purged from the army. This act by the 'friendly' Indians was not construed as 'Spoils to the Victor' but more as an act of treachery and loot. What the Pakistanis started was completed by the Indians, that is the 'Plunder of Bangladesh'. This was further exacerbated with the flooding of counterfeit notes and withdrawal of Pakistani coins by the Indians during 1972-4, which led to the demonitisation in 1974.

It did not stop there. The Indians, under the guise of friendship, flooded our market with cheap goods, although the same manufacturing concerns were exporting 'quality goods' to the rest of the world. Many industries were set up in Bangladesh with Indian machinery and technology but over 90 per cent of those concerns faced insurmountable problems as there was a total lack of commitment from the Indian counterparts. Delays in shipment and technical assistance to set up industries compounded with the supply of faulty machinery, were the order of the day. Over a sustained period of time, these acts did little to allay the suspicions of Bangladeshis towards the Indians. The government in power in India did precious little to change this deplorable trend. The initiative could have been taken by the Indians by being fair and magnanimous reflecting the size of that country to engender friendly ties but that was perhaps too much to ask of them. The long-drawn problems related to Ganges water sharing, or the lack of it, was a testimony of the overall Indian attitude towards Bangladesh. If the Congress of India was against any agree-

ment with Bangladesh, as Mr Nayar points out, how did the 25 year pact come about in 1972?

Regarding Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it does not require any individual's or party's stamp of approval or endorsement to recognise his contribution as the 'Torch Bearer' of the Bangladesh's Liberation Movement. It must be, however, noted that the vast majority of Bangladeshis decided against one Pakistan in the night of March 25, 1971 and spontaneously participated for independence. Till that day, it was a struggle to establish the inalienable rights of the people of the country.

The Awami League, during 1971-5 did not have a clue about governance (being basically geared towards agitation only) and did not have a political platform from where they could reach the people because of their inherent weaknesses within the party cadres, most of whom were not indoctrinated in the social order the party hierarchy envisaged for Bangladesh. A foreign and alien social system, which went against the grain and interest of the masses and which had no relevance to the liberation struggle, was thrust on the people without stopping to assess the merits of that system and how it would impact the lives of people used to century-old ways.

On top of running a new country with practically no experience or wealth excepting its people, the party thought it expedient to enforce a new system at that juncture instead of gradually changing over after taking over the helm. On the one hand, they pontificated 'socialism' and on the other, 'licences' and 'permits' to carry on private business were generously doled out to party stalwarts and sycophants and who had no inkling of business. Any opposition to this practice was ruthlessly dealt with. This did not bore well with the people and as such it took 21 years for the Awami League to make a comeback. It does not take 21 years for a popular party to come to power again. A popular movement as was adopted to oust the despot and autocrat in 1990, is always possible so long it enfranchises the will of the people.

Mr Nayar errs in stating that Bangladesh was under military or semi-military rules for the last 21 years. It should be pointed out to him that since 1991, Bangladesh had a legitimately elected democratic government in place. The scathing attack on the leader of the opposition smacks of bad taste but he forgets that the same may be applied to the present regime in respect to their activities during 1994-6. Mr Nayar is, however, correct in saying that the politicians of our country should stop politicking and pussy footing around and get on with the serious business of running a country efficiently for the welfare of the nation.

To the Editor...

Role of the police

Sir, The police are there to enforce law and order for both the haves and the have-nots. To prevent various crimes from the society, the present government has urged upon the police not to serve any party interest. But are they following the pledge? We saw police, in the past, to act in favour of the rich and parties but never to serve the common helpless people.

Is there any exception to that nowadays? It is necessary that their very attitude be changed at the earliest. The government is ready to monitor the police activities so that they don't become the pawns of any political group. We hope our Prime Minister achieves her goals.

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Problems

Sir, Here is a thing which I should say is the blessing of Almighty God. Normally, there is no problem there may be some when people make the atmosphere polluted and suffer from diseases. Well, about health for example. Having had a major operation for my right-side tooth, cold cough and fever have been hindering my studies for a long time.

There are other problems. Whenever I traverse from one place to another, I see people make things harder. I have the right to travel in accordance with the Constitution's Clause 36, and for study as per Article 15(a).

Let's live a life without problems.
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