

Khaleda's Sensible Decision

This is not a change of gear, but seemingly a change in the substance of Opposition politics in the country. Begum Zia's assertion that her demand for early election stems from her belief that 'polls are the only means to change government' puts opposition politics, which has been on the mend for some time anyway, firmly on course now. This is the most heartening departure that Begum Zia has marked from her hitherto one-point refrain — either the government resign or face ouster — which obviously carried no conviction in a democracy. This also baffled the electorate a great deal because of the no-confidence expressed in its verdict handed in the last general election. It impinged on the principle of popular sovereignty.

In a functioning democracy the ruling party can be unseated from power before the end of its tenure only by constitutional means and not through street agitation or calls for a movement to oust it. This has been our consistent editorial position on the one-point agenda that ruled the opposition roost so far. And Begum Zia's latest eschewing of the ouster call and taking to the democratic means for a change of government have vindicated our stance. We have only recently suggested editorially that Begum Zia's demand for mid-term polls and her call for toppling the government are mutually contradictory positions. Happily, this contradiction has been overcome and she has settled for a purely electoral course. We think this should be a turning point in national politics.

Significantly, BNP's strikingly positive outlook comes as a sequel to a series of moves on its part triggered by the feel of popular pulse, something which we tried to implore the political parties to go by. It has been a gradual expansion of the circle of positivism with the BNP ranging from half-day hartal through use of alternatives to hartal to seeking a change of government via elections alone. In-between, the opposition leader put out a robust call for dialogue adding that 'all problems' could be resolved through it.

For her part Begum Zia has moved full circle ahead and it is evidently for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina now to reciprocate the same and bring about an early rapprochement for the good of the country as well as their own.

You've Done Us Proud

At the Grange Cricket Ground in Edinburgh, Scotland, expatriate Bangladeshis waved green-and-red flags, danced and sang. Back in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country, the streets reverberated with youngsters singing, dancing, chanting slogans and exploding fire-crackers at dead hours of night. The occasion certainly demanded such wild celebrations: our cricketers have made history. They have carved their first-ever win in the game's premier event, the World Cup.

Thank you, cricketers. You have made us immensely proud.

Monday's win against Scotland has certainly erased memories of Bangladesh's nightmarish start to their first appearance in cricket's elite assemblage. No one, not even the staunchest of supporters, had expected the cricketers to triumph over either New Zealand or the West Indies. The meek surrender before the Kiwis was not what everyone wanted, either. They wanted Aminul Islam and his men to fight with honour, even in defeat. They wanted the combative zeal as displayed against the Caribbeans. Thankfully, the cricketers have lived up to expectations against the Scots. It was a promise kept, a dream fulfilled.

If anyone can be singled out for individual contribution, it definitely is Minhazul Abedin. When chips were down, the former national skipper showed dogged determination to lead his side out of the woods to a respectable total. Not only that, he also chipped in with a valuable wicket when the Scots appeared coasting. Minhaz more than justified his late, and controversial, inclusion in the World Cup squad with his sterling performance. Credit also goes to the bowlers and the fielders. Even when the Scots were doing well, they never gave up hopes, and their resolve paid the dividend at the end.

True, as the reigning ICC Trophy champions, Bangladesh were favoured to win the 'battle of the babes'. However, that does not, in any way, undermine the cricketers' achievement. A win in the World Cup, whoever it comes against, is a fabulous feat, no matter what the detractors say.

Fare well, cricketers, for the rest of the championship.

Highhandedness on Highway

A transport barricade on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway on Monday totally disrupted vehicular movement on this important road for long eight hours. According to newspaper reports, a police patrol of Bandar thana led by an assistant sub-inspector had demanded a sum of Tk five hundred from a truck driver. The latter agreeing to pay Tk two hundred only, the allegedly enraged patrol party went to the point of beating up the truck driver and breaking his legs and arms. The news spread quickly and soon the place swarmed with transport workers from nearby Shimrail truck stand and they put up a barricade at 7 in the morning. This resulted in a traffic jam on both sides of the highway that was almost forty kilometres long. PM's security force was also caught in the barricade.

Thousands of travelling people were thrown into utter confusion and acute hardship as they abandoned their transports and many buses returned to Dhaka from Shimrail as they could not proceed further. Lot of tension was generated because of the police high-handedness and a couple of policemen were also roughed up by the barricading transport workers. The situation eased around noon when senior police officials with the help of the Union Parishad chairman of Siddirgonj and leaders of the truck drivers talked them out of the barricade and ordered temporary suspension of the police officer and four of his accomplices.

Police have been known for their habit of extorting money and the nexus between them and the transport workers is also an open secret. But how dare they beat up a driver who was within his rights to refuse a toll? The stories of police excesses are all too many these days and if the government is found wanting in applying brake on these it might get unpopular very quickly. So rein in the wayward among the police force to justify the public money spent to maintain it.

High Stakes Politics in India

The stand taken by Sonia is reminiscent of the stand taken by late President John F Kennedy in 1960. When Kennedy was campaigning to become President of the USA, he was attacked rather viciously because he was a Roman Catholic. The White House of the USA had never had a Roman Catholic. John F Kennedy faced the situation head on and won handsily.

dence, regional parties have become important like the AIADMK of Jayalalitha or the Samajbadi Dal, the Communists and many assorted parties of the Left and the Right.

The forthcoming elections are unlikely to produce an outright winner. Coalition is very much on the cards. What, however, is important is the overall performance of the two largest parties. The Indian National Congress had a steady erosion of popularity through decades of exercising power.

For instance, in the largest Indian state Uttar Pradesh, with the largest number of seats in the Parliament, traditionally the stronghold of the Congress, the situation came to such a pass that in the outgoing Parliament, the Congress did not have a single member. Indeed since the Babri Masjid episode, the Muslims of India numbering nearly 125 million, one-seventh of the population, have progressively abandoned their party — the Congress.

The rise of Sonia Gandhi to the top position of the oldest Indian political party — the Indian National Congress — has to be viewed from this angle. Among other things it is really to woo the Muslim voters back within the fold of the Congress. She belongs to, willy, nilly, the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. And in

tradition bound India dynasty means a lot. After the assassination of her Prime Minister husband Rajiv Gandhi, son of late Premier Indira Gandhi, herself assassinated in the early eighties, Sonia stayed scrupulously away from politics. She devoted her time in bringing up her son and daughter.

And yet such is the magic of Nehru-Gandhi name that she was prevailed upon to take a hand in salvaging the old and sinking Congress ship. She was

rastra politician Sharad Pawar. He, however, did not challenge her directly until very recently.

The situation is reminiscent of the early days of Indira, Gandhi, when power broker put her on the highest pedestal of state power of India, with the expectation of manipulating her. It is now well known how that power broker miscalculated because Indira Gandhi rose to become a powerful Prime Minister of India.

Sensing power slipping out

that they did not want Sonia to resign as President of the Congress party but not stake her claim to the post of Prime Minister since it was a question of 'national integrity, principle and country's prestige'.

Faced with this challenge, Sonia Gandhi resigned from the post of President of the Indian National Congress. This as expected, triggered an avalanche of resignations from important posts by leaders of Indian National Congress. There was a veritable 'return Sonia' campaign and chances were that she would be prevailed upon to withdraw her resignation. And she has returned, perhaps stronger on the political scene. There are political pundits who have stated that this whole operation has been stage-managed by Congress big-wigs to give a fresh coat of varnish on their sagging prestige and popularity.

It did not take long for the situation to come to a head. The powerful Congress Working Committee has expelled the three leaders. It was being pronounced that the departure of these three leaders would lead to a serious split within the party. That looks less than certain. The stand taken by Sonia is reminiscent of the stand taken by late President John F Kennedy in 1960. When Kennedy was campaigning to



Arshad-uz Zaman

successful to some extent in winning seats for their candidates. And she took the plunge some time back and was elected the President of the Indian National Congress. There were nummings in the corridors of power of her Italian origin and Roman Catholic religion.

It has been repeatedly stressed that for nearly fifteen years after her marriage she had not taken the Indian nationality. These rumours were originating mostly from the camp of the powerful Maha-

of their hands three powerful politicians — one Hindu Sharad Pawar, one Christian Sangma and one Muslim Anwar, demanded in an open letter that Sonia foregoes her claim on Prime Ministership, because of her foreign origin. What these three Congress leaders have done is to bring out into the open this whole question of foreign nationality, a question that was being raised by the principal adversary — the BJP.

The adversaries of Sonia, led by Sharad Pawar have argued

Strange Words, Stranger Failures

by Kazi Alaaddin Ahmed

The recent failures due to double role played by some of the team members must be thoroughly investigated into and the culprits brought to book forthwith and given exemplary punishment. For a small number of crooks the entire police force cannot digest the slur.

very difficult for any one to recall how he was brought by former President Abdur Rahman Biswas to replace General Nasim in May 1996. It wouldn't be difficult either to imagine what was the primary consideration to select him. Was it seniority alone or something beyond? Was it not a truth that being himself a kin of a BNP stalwart from Dinajpur he was considered the only available person who could be trusted with the position of C-in-C in place of General Nasim? Shall he be able to claim that when opposition Awami League, yet to win the forthcoming general election and have its government installed at that transition period uttered a single word against his selection or appointment? No, none did. On the contrary, the new government of Sheikh Hasina reinforced it by pledging its all out support to the valiant soldiers led by General Mahbubur Rahman. Till his retirement or expiry of contract the Awami League government didn't ever question his loyalty even though it could have been known to Sheikh Hasina what his mental keepings was and where lay his ultimate allegiance. Nevertheless, he served the government well.

It is not to question any one's fundamental right. We welcome this new adjunct to BNP leadership of a person of

General Mahbub's stature. We would like to see him flourish and make his mark in the political arena. But we would certainly disdian his indirect and subtle remark on one of his colleagues in the armed services under the pretext of criticising the government. He has sadly ridiculed himself by being so unkind and obtrusive. However, the other part of his speech would not be contended against because it was not worthy of mention for being redundant.

We have had another most intriguing news recently. It was all about the abortive raids of the police in the Dhaka University Halls to haul up alleged thugs fondly named as party cadres besides illegal occupants. Equally distressing was the news of secret information city-basti on secret information about a huge stock of heroine there worth over taka three crore. This too, was an exercise in futility due to forehead leakage of the impending raid there. Senior police officers were of the opinion that somebody within the police contingent concerned divulged the secret to the criminals ahead enabling their escape before police appeared on the scene. All these plainly confirm that there is a group of persons, 'double agents' within the law enforcing agencies who make easy financial gain from the drug traders.

The situation would invari-

ably need an introspective review and examination. Assuming that all these secret and sudden police raids are preceded by:

— tip off from the source at site;

— counter-check through other sources;

— examination of the primary information thus collected, including cross-examination of the sources;

— objective analysis to determine the dimension of the crime;

— assessing possibilities of behind the scene involvement of the so-called 'godfathers' and their probable strong linkage vertically upward;

— appraisal of the bosses and taking their instructions;

— drawing up operational plans with a number of alternatives;

— deliberation on the alternatives and ultimate selection of the one considered most effective and rewarding;

— organisation of the team(s), selection of the participating members of the teams;

— fixing of date and time of actual raid to be conducted.

These and many other activities would naturally form a part of the whole operational plan. Invariably therefore, it shall entail involvement of a number of police personnel at different levels. Understand-

ably, here lies the vulnerability or otherwise as to success or failure of each of these haul-up plans. I say so, because ordinarily there is no guarantee that the members participating in these secret plan-making shall have the same level of commitment to maintain the secrecy till after the implementation. Inevitably, it will call for identifying certain fool-proof strategies and mechanism to ensure individual reliability and trustworthiness. It's indeed a very difficult task. Still then, some good results are expected if the relevant authority can go by these rules and principles:

— the original or main source be thoroughly investigated before he is fixed up for any specific job;

— such investigation will include, among other things, his antecedents, personal habits, linkages, intimacies with the residents of the locality, etc;

— the source must never have any access to the operational plan, particularly the date and time of the operation;

— the number of persons involved in the plan-making should be restricted to a maximum of five. They will be under oath not to divulge the contents of the plan, nor even discuss it with own family members under any circumstances;

— in case of divulgence detected upon actual implementation of the operational plan all

become President of the USA. he was attacked rather viciously because he was a Roman Catholic. The White House of the USA had never had a Roman Catholic. John F Kennedy faced the situation head on and won handsily.

While this political gamesmanship continues, what are the Indian voters thinking? Of course the bread and butter issue would be uppermost in their minds. The BJP under Vajpayee has been attempting valiantly to shed off its religious fanatic image and hold on to the centre ground of Indian politics.

The Indian National Congress is firmly rooted in the centre ground with attempts to revive its secular credentials. Those secular credentials were severely jolted by the destruction of the Babri Masjid and Muslim vote left in droves. The return of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, even with foreign-born Sonia, appears to be the only ticket to the heart of the Muslim voters. Used to exercising power, the Indian National Congress has gone into the wilderness for several years now. They desperately want to return to power and it would appear for the masses of India, Sonia's foreign-ness would count for little. At least that is the meaning of the decision of the working committee of the Indian National Congress.

What is certain is that for the present a very interesting political game is being played in Delhi. It is not between Ram or Rome but rather between Chananaka and Machiavelli.

these five will, primarily, have to bear personal responsibility jointly and severally. They will be under threat of losing their job immediately. By this collective responsibility will be ensured.

— the whole plan of action will have to be codified in such a manner so as to keep the secretarial staff in total darkness.

— the other members of the team will have no idea till they actually reach the place of raid;

— dodge the source about the date and time of actual operation so that he is not able to play a double role;

— depute a small team to survey the place before actual operation;

— retain special incentive to all the team members provided the operation succeeds in terms of the information given by the source.

There could be many more deterrent measures to prevent forehead leakage. The team leaders must caution themselves against such underhand activity on the part of any one in the team. They must be kept under threat to lose their jobs or summarily dismissed. The appropriate authority may consider these points and determine their effective applicability in future. Meantime, the recent failures due to double role played by some of the team members must be thoroughly investigated into and the culprits brought to book forthwith and given exemplary punishment. For a small number of crooks the entire police force cannot digest the slur. They must rise to defend themselves. They are certainly capable. They have our confidence.

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.

Don't touch a single tree!

Sir, The government is trying out a new propaganda by stating that there are only about 1,600 trees in the Osmani Uddyan. Okay, so be it. Now, our PM is repeatedly saying that three trees will be planted for every tree felled for the purpose of making space for the Conference Centre. But, how long will it take for those new saplings to grow into the size of the current ones and at what location would that be?

These seem like empty talk at best. The way our political leaders go — they don't seem to be able to remember their promise to the people once their own purpose is served. So, they even don't have any moral right.

We would just like to say: don't touch a single tree!

An Anxious Observer
Chittagong.

Nannu's performance

Sir, I fully agree with Tawfiq Aziz Khan's comment in A View from the Gully' on May 23 issue of the DS that the fuss over Minhazul Abedin Nannu's exclusion at the cost of Jahangir Alam's from original 15-member World Cup squad was unjustified.

The way poor Jahangir Alam was omitted from the original team at the last moment was very much unethical and painful.

Even when Nannu was not included in the team against New Zealand we came to know that he dared to express his resentment declaring that he would retire from cricket on return to Dhaka. We sincerely hope he should keep his promise.

I think after his dismal show against West Indies, Nannu must have thought that it would have been better for him if he was not at all included in all the matches of Bangladesh in the ongoing

World Cup. In the process, he could build up another issue. He should know that all the 15 members can't play in a match. Disciplinary action should be taken against these types of behaviour on the part of the players for the betterment of sports in our country.

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Herbal pesticide

Sir, We noted with interest a report from Panchagarh on Herbal Pesticide in the DS on 17/5/99.

This will be a great invention if the herbal pesticide works, as claimed. We wish to learn more about the efficacy of the pesticides like which insects or diseases the pesticide can control, how to apply and application frequency etc.

The inventor may please be requested to send his sample to Rice Research Institute and Agricultural Research Institute for testing and recommendation. Otherwise the pesticide may be called a hoax similar to such other claims in the past.

The report mentioned that the government has given official recognition to the herbal pesticide. Which government authorities have given the recognition and permission to production? Satisfy Islam may please contact the Plant Protection Department that is the only authority to give the recognition and permission for production and sale of the pesticide.

Khalilur Rahman
Banani, Dhaka

The magnificent obsession

Sir, The problem with the mighty Awami League is that it is suffering from a magnificent obsession. It is living in the past its own world of maya. It has to change with the times, to be in tune with the changing society and the new generations

with new visions. History is not static, but it records the dynamic progress or evolution of civilisation. What is done cannot be undone. Put a small red flag on a drop of water coming down from the Himalayas and trace its journey to the sea. What are the chances that it will be back to its preceding origin?

Such one-track one-way minds remind us of the ostrich with the head buried in the sand. Communication is the name of the game these days. The feedback loops have to be recognised for system correction.

A political party, to survive and thrive, must be adaptable to the coming century will be overlaid with a changing brought about by the information technology (IT). AL plans looking backwards. Such exercises set up undesirable and impractical visions. Time is wasted. Time is wealth.

Our political parties appear to be holding the country as hostage; therefore holding it back. The act of clinging is a not a sign of inner strength and leadership. Let go, advice the wisest, and ponder over items on the nation's pending list. Let us get on with the next job.

A Zabr
Dhaka

Qualifying marks

Sir, I thank Mr Dollar of Rajshai for his valuable, timely and important demand published in the 'Janakantha' of 04/05/99. The fact came out from the writing is that those students who have scored total marks of 1250 or above in their SSC and HSC exams and qualified in respective written tests should be eligible for admission in the private medical colleges. The bar of 1300 marks in the government medical colleges is justified considering the seat capacity in these colleges.

But to encourage and expand medical education, this bar should be reduced. On the other hand to ensure quality of medical and dental education, the students must qualify in the admission tests. Two to three years back, the qualifying marks were 1200. All of a sudden it was made 1300 due to unknown reason. If the present bar of 1300 marks is not lifted students cherishing hope of becoming a qualified doctor will

not be able to materialise their aspiration.

Under the above circumstances it is the demand of thousands of students and their guardians to the private medical college authorities and to the BMDC to reduce the qualifying marks from 1300 to 1250 for admission in the private medical and dental colleges.

Prottoy
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

The poor image of the NGOs

Sir, The vernacular press is galore with the shady undoings of the NGOs; starting with the sensational revelations about GSS, one of the biggest NGO networks in the country. After going through some of these clippings, it is necessary to separate the chaff from the grain.

There are many types of alleged misdeeds which could be grouped into several distinct categories. With the rather lax official control on the rapid proliferation of thousands of NGOs in the country, two main weak areas have developed: the weaknesses in the NGO system of working, which need to be addressed; and individuals and groups inside the NGOs who are corrupt and after personal gains. Both the organisational system, and the human factors have to be channelled into the right direction.

Besides irregularities such as accepting foreign grants from donor agencies without the knowledge or approval of the government (as pointed out in the NGO Bureau reports, with quotes in the press), some NGOs are openly indulging in official business activities, including sales and exports, which do not appear to fall under the 'non-profit' category (the grey areas are difficult to spot). The government's powerful NGO Bureau is primarily responsible for the regulation and monitoring of the NGO network. But its reports are neither discussed in the press. Are the big NGOs becoming powerful, assertive and semi-autonomous? Perhaps Yes.

There are to other trends which need cautious monitoring and remedial action; alleged religious conversions by some NGOs, and the subtle attempts of politicisations of the NGOs (starting with ADAB?), who have the deepest home-to-home penetration rate in the rural ar-

ea; an advantage of immense value in communities where 80 per cent of the citizens may be illiterate. Information is power, and control of the medium has powerful influence at all levels of the society. In the LDCs the verbal, audio and visual message count.

With the exposure of giant GSS, the other NGOs are busy in shielding activities from forthcoming probes. The donor agencies have been alerted; hence the source of funding is going to dry up to a trickle, at least for some time. The resulting fall-out in the NGO sector in the near future would have far-reaching social, cultural and economic implication, which will ultimately effect governance and national policy guidelines.

The press exposures were necessary for public focus on the filthy game within the NGOs; but credit has to be given for the revolutionary work done by them in a developing country such as Bangladesh, according to the goals and objectives of NGO philosophy. The NGO system works, but it has to be fine-tuned according to cumulative experience. For this political stability, will and concurrence are needed; which, sadly, are not forthcoming at present.

Abul M Ahmad
Dhaka

Thanks to anti-CIH student

Sir, I would like to congratulate Mr M Monirul Islam Sharif student of Computer Science of Dhaka University for his outstanding achievement in developing a software for retrieval of the information damaged by the CIH virus. The development of M-Recovery software by Mr Sharif within a shortest possible time after the disaster is really a credit-worthy work. It will save a lot of money and energy of about 6 million computer users.

We are proud of this young computer specialist. His innovation indicates that there are lot of possibilities among the young group of people in our country. If they are properly guided and groomed, they would be able to compete with the developed world, contribute in acquisition of new knowledge and solve the day-to-day problems of the country.

— In the developed countries

the prospective scientists are in a position to show their talents during their student life. But that does not generally happen in our country. Therefore under the existing academic atmosphere, the achievement of Mr Sharif will encourage his classmates and colleagues to devote themselves in pursuit of knowledge. Appreciation is also due to the Computer Science Department of Dhaka University as they have been able to guide the student to innovate something new.

Our boys and girls are showing interest in computer education. But the facilities available are very limited for quality education. The existing number of seats for computer science or engineering should be increased in the University of Dhaka and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology to produce good number of computer specialist to meet the needs of the coming years.

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Income tax trouble

Sir, In accordance with the existing system, the personal income tax is payable to those who earn more than Tk. 60,000 per year. It is an inconsistent amount while Taka is continuously devaluing. The income tax payers are directly affected by this amount which should at least be Taka 1,00,000.

The house rent ceiling (tax free) has been fixed at Taka 5,000 which is not at all justified at the current house rent rate. Even a two-room house rent is Taka 5,000. A person earning Taka 40,000 per month can never manage to stay in a 5000 Taka rented house. This house rent (tax free) should at least be Taka 10,000.

The total family conveyance (tax free) cost has been fixed at Taka 350 per month which is quite insufficient. A family consisting 4-members at least needs Taka 1000 per month.

Previously there was a system of tax exemption for the expenditure of children's education. This is no more provided now. If the system is properly then the poor income tax payers could be greatly relieved.

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