

## Plethora of self-congratulations

### Self-praise is no praise

THE students front of Sheikh Hasina's party, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) held a reception for its leader to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her return home, in 1980, after five years abroad following the brutal assassination of her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in August 1975. As a part of the commemoration BCL also gave her the title "Desh Ratna"(Jewel of the Nation). Few weeks earlier the peasants front of the party, Bangladesh Krishak League gave her the title "Krishak Ratna" (Jewel of the Peasants). What will the other fronts of her party do now? If they are not to be left behind in pleasing their leader then we are likely to see the Bangladesh Sramik League (the labour front), the Bangladesh Jubo League (youth front) dish out titles like "Sramik Ratna" and "Juba Ratna". After her nine (or is it 11) doctorate collection from various Universities of the world, we are now witnessing the "Ratna" collection.

The universal truth that "self-praise is no praise" obviously has no place in AL thinking. Are they not aware that giving titles to their leader is making a laughing stock out of the whole thing? How many party titles did Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy, Bhashani have? In the case of our next door neighbour India, how many party titles did Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar or Indira have? If Bangabandhu wanted couldn't he have had far more "Ratna" titles from his party than any other leader could ever get? Yes, some of the leaders mentioned received 'titles' from the people. But that was after a life long service at the end of which a grateful nation most willingly bestowed such titles on them. Let us use the PM's own illustrious father as an example. After his lifetime of politics in which he suffered more than a decade of imprisonment and at the height of the 11-point movement under which the people forced the Pakistani government to release Sheikh Mujib that he was given the title of "Bangabandhu".

What we are witnessing now is sycophancy reaching absurd and laughable extent. An elected leader is expected to have enough humility and self-awareness to understand that people who are the ultimate judge in a democracy, do not find any merit in such self-proclaimed greatness. Do not underestimate our people in being able to distinguish the real from the fake and the substantive from the propaganda. Who do the AL think they are fooling? Perhaps only themselves.

## Camel jockeys from Bangladesh

### Stop abuse of minor boys in UAE

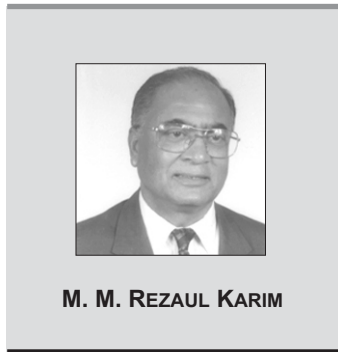
THE death of a seven-year-old camel jockey has outraged public opinion. Najmul was sold into bondage in the United Arab Emirates at the age of five. He served as one of hundreds of camel jockeys that are routinely used to provide entertainment to the racing elite of the Middle East, in his case, to the UAE. After three years of undergoing physical and mental damage as a camel jockey, he was sent back to Bangladesh where he finally succumbed to his injuries.

What could be more of an outrage than such willful cruelty towards a minor? The tiny jockeys are often tied to the back of the camels which results in their being dragged or squashed if the beasts fall. If not tied, the minors are flung to the ground. Such abuse in the name of sport should be condemned and the strongest penalties sought against perpetrators. The UAE passed a law in 1993 prohibiting the use of boys under 14 as camel jockeys. But the practice has not been eradicated. In spite of international outrage, the abuse of minors as camel jockeys has continued in the Middle East. Hundreds of minors are 'stolen' from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and spirited to remote farms in the UAE where they are kept in virtual imprisonment and forced to race in encounters witnessed by the local citizenry.

We endorse in the strongest terms the memorandum presented to the UAE ambassador by a coalition of lawyers, human rights activists and children's groups, against the continuing exploitation of children for camel racing. The Bangladesh government continues to turn a blind eye to the abuse though it is well known that unscrupulous agents lure minors from poor families with promises of profitable employment in the Middle East. We urge it to come down hard on these agents and ensure vigilance at airports. Our embassies, too, must be held accountable for failing to act in protection of our young citizens.

The gruesome experiences of minor Bangladeshi boys must be halted. This is not only a legal issue, but also a moral outrage.

# Some thoughts on Awami League's special election strategy



WITH the fast approaching parliamentary election, people have started to speculate on the policies, strategy and tactics being employed by major political parties in their bid to win the race. The standard methods of action practiced by political parties for this purpose evidently evoke little interest for them. They are more interested in and are unusually vigilant over the extraordinary methods and actions designed by political parties to give them an edge over their rivals at the polls. The ruling party being the repository of all state power and resources has the opportunity of employing and enjoying them. It seems they not only enjoy these in a gusto but do not hesitate to exploit these fully to meet their own interests. The opposition political parties obviously have no access to such facilities.

Let us take the issue of partisanship in administration. The Election Commission, the apex body and pivot of all election activities whose neutrality must remain above board, has been a prime target. There, a senior government official, who had identified himself on a public platform with the Awami League and joined its political movement against the BNP government prior to the 1996 elections, was made an

Election Commissioner. The Secretary of the Commission is a close relative of a ruling party stalwart and has already manifested his partisanship through his undesirable presence in the Pabna by-election and by canvassing in favour of the ruling party candidate. Some of the other officials of the Commission were chosen by the government for a special purpose and sent from the Establishment Division, which is under Prime Minister's Secretariat. Secondly, the government has

existing officials, who are being replaced, were unfit in their posts. This is absurd. It is obvious that those who find themselves on the fit list would be able to do some special favours to the ruling party in times of need.

The 20th Bangladesh Civil Service Examination, specially the viva voce part of it, has been a scam and the Opposition protested loudly. At the oral test, past Awami political involvement and Awami connection of the candidates were the deter-

mining factors for success of a candidate. The most blatant manifestation of partisanship of the Chairman and some members of the Public Service Commission put this highly respected august body in shame and disgrace. These newly recruited several hundred Junior Magistrates and Assistant Superintendents of Police, much higher in number than the originally scheduled intake, this year will now be available for election duties.

Thirdly, Awami League Members of Parliament and leaders are being granted special material benefits in the form of wheat and rice ostensibly for distribution among workers, the poor and the needy. The beneficiaries are supposed to work on programmes, such as food for work, construction or repairing of roads, bridges, culverts, schools, colleges and other social and educational projects as well as digging of canals, working on drainage and other water management projects. Many others have received cash and kind as parts of test relief. All these allocations have been made by a number of Ministries and Divisions, namely Water Resources, Local Government, Relief and Rehabilitation, etc. The total amount of wheat and rice doled out under this scheme amounted to, according to some estimate, about Taka 300 crores. The interesting and the most objectionable feature of this scheme

is that such grants are being given almost exclusively to the ruling party's MPs and their local party leaders. No uniform rules or criteria, except the unwritten orders to exclude opposition MPs and leaders, were devised and followed in matters of allocation and distribution. Even where district officials have been allowed discretion of making initial allocations, their authority has been clipped by the requirement of obtaining final approval of the ruling party's Minister held in charge of the district.

The purpose of these schemes evidently boils down to the fact that most of this enormous government funds of Taka 300 crores will be utilized for electioneering purpose of the Awami League. Besides, the increased allocation of Taka 1800 crores under Annual Development Programme may be another significant pointer in that direction. The primary responsibility for countering such political bribes to voters now rests on the Election Commission, which has vast scope and requisite authority to do the needful. Fourthly, an important strategy of the ruling party has always been to wreck the 4-Party Alliance of the Opposition from its very inception. The formation of the Alliance of these Parties which had enjoyed the support of over two-thirds voters in the last election made the ruling party gravely worried. To the ruling party, the Alliance posed a veritable threat to its chance of winning even a respectable number of seats in the next Parliament. But the Awami League leader took up the challenge in all earnest. After General Ershad joined the Opposition movement, she sarcastically remarked it was she who would decide whether Ershad would move in the street (Rajpath) or rest in prison (Rajhar). That is why precisely she traded Ershad's freedom from jail for his breaking away from the Opposition Alliance. The Opposition described the government's present action as a glaring example of blackmail and Ershad's volte-face as a towering act of betrayal. Some BNP stalwarts, however, termed Ershad's departure as good riddance, as his betrayal at a later stage would have caused greater harm to the Alliance.

The ruling party is now engaged in working out a similar deal with Jamaat's Secretary General in his prison cell with all the persuasion, enticement and intimidation at its command.

Finally, the strongest pillars on which the Awami League's special strategy rests are the use of black money and armed terrorists. It is known that all past governments have also been guilty of some such thing or the other. But the performance of Awami League Ministers, leaders and their family members under the present regime surpassed all others. A part of the huge amount of money and resources, it is said, has been channelled to party coffers. Capacity to resort to terrorism in the Awami League, with the support of required resources, is unsurpassed and no other political party can come near it. The country has never witnessed so huge, sophisticated arms, coming from across the borders and distributed all over the country. While the BNP leaders have been shouting at the top of their voice to retrieve illegal arms, the stony silence on the part of the ruling party leaders is, by contrast, highly significant and deeply frightening. The oncoming caretaker government, therefore, has a Herculean task to accomplish in order to redress the ills and create a situation congenial for holding a free, fair and peaceful election. This will be an acid test for them and provide an opportunity to go down in history as per their performance. By their side, one can confidently assure, will remain the unshackled public servants and the conscious citizenry of the country.

Former Ambassador M M Rezaul Karim is a Member of BNP's Advisory Council.

# The crossroads of friendship

IKRAM SEHGAL  
write from Karachi

ON the receiving end of world opinion for some time, the Chinese Premier's visit was a much needed tonic for Pakistan. China has been a tried and trusted friend in need since 1965, how did we ever manage to loosen the remarkably strong bond with Pakistan's friend indeed? And should we now compound the situation by turning away from the US altogether? One of the imperatives of foreign policy is that we must avoid extreme change, another is that change if it comes must be for good reason, next when change does come it must be gradual, then it must conform to prevalent national security imperatives and lastly, it must be in the national interest. Change must never be sudden, never for change's sake and never for short term advantage. Above all, change must never be for an individual person's gain. Far too long Pakistan's foreign policy resembles a chameleon, changing shape to suit the occasion.

The metamorphosis of US policy vis-à-vis Pakistan is in keeping with para 5 (c) of the Memo dated May 21, 1965 of (then) US Ambassador to India Chester Bowles to US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, to quote, "our present military alliance with Pakistan has become irrelevant to the present situation in Asia, this policy was created in a different era to meet totally different conditions". Pertinent points from the same Memo, (1) with relevance to US objectives in Asia, para 2, "India by virtue of its size, resources, potential and economic potential and geographic location is of great importance to US national interest, (2) with relevance of present US policy, para 4, despite the fact that India's domestic and foreign objectives coincide more closely with our (i.e. US) interests than do those of any other major emerging nation, we have been losing influence in India to the extent that may begin to jeopardize our (i.e. US) interests throughout Asia and (3) military aid only confined to logistical and tactical requirements "for meeting the

threat from Communist China".

Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) were meant to contain possible communist threat in Asia from the Soviet Union and China respectively. After the 1962 India-China war and massive US military aid to India, these military alliances became redundant as we got closer to China, both countries emulating Chanakya's "an enemy of an enemy is a friend".

With the 1965 war came US suspension of military aid to both Pakistan and India. (Then) Foreign Minister Bhutto bitterly told the US Ambassador on 10 Sept 1965 that the US was not displaying the position of an "ally" but that of a "neutral", that suspension would make no differ-

would be divided and had contingency plans in place soon after the Dec 70 elections, a year before Dec 16, 1971. China continued to publicly stand by Pakistan in 1971 in the same manner as it did in 1965, privately Chinese leaders encouraged Pakistan to resolve the East Pakistan problem by political rather than military means.

The US criticism of Pakistan's attempts to go nuclear in response to the 1974 Indian blast was far more vociferous than US condemnation of India who actually carried out a nuclear explosion. President Carter pointedly bypassed Pakistan in 1978 when visiting India, despite this "most favoured associate" of the COMECON lining up always against the US in international forums like

ride away? We are hypocrites to now lament that the US abandoned us in Afghanistan once its own policy interests were served. If the US had not mounted the massive anti-Soviet effort the Soviets would still be in Afghanistan and we would still be helping the Mujahideen.

Compare the windfall Egypt has received (and continues to receive), for serving US interests to the pittance Pakistan got from the US for its troubles. But why should we blame the US, why didn't our leaders hold out for more? The fault lies squarely on the shoulder of our leaders who miserably failed in protecting the vital interests of the country. What to talk of hard bargaining about economic and military aid, during and after the war, our (then)

you" attitude towards distant cousins, we should have held on to China's economic and military apron strings, benefiting enormously from the economically resurgent China of the 80s and the 90s. Putting it bluntly, we had a ticket but we missed the boat! We naively assumed Pakistan as a "cornerstone of US policy" for eternity, the US saw it as a God-given one-time chance to "Vietnamize" the Soviets in Afghanistan and took it. We made bloody fools of ourselves in believing that such an "alliance of convenience" would last for ever. In the late 80s, as the Afghan wound down, (then) US Ambassador Robert Oakley, Jr a blunt person who was nicknamed "the Viceroy", would tell anyone who would listen in Pakistan

dynamic and sustained economic growth in India and Pakistan, and para 1 (4), to reduce tension between India and Pakistan to the maximum extent possible, while in para 5 (c) give aid as a carrot to draw India and Pakistan into mutually beneficial cooperative economic ventures with military aid to India conditional on India's willingness to work toward a reconciliation with Pakistan and lastly, as US influence increases with India, to moderate India's relationship with Pakistan. US Secretary of State Gen Colin Powell last week confirmed this very even-handed rendition of policy before the US Senate Appropriations Committee, thirty six years after the famous Chester Bowles Memo.

US foreign policy has now come a complete circle since 1971, back to the containment of China. The Hainan incident is Godsent for Pakistan, it has confirmed the broad brush Bush, Jr viewpoint about China as a "strategic competitor" of the US. With nothing to show except the blessings of a strategic geopolitical location, Pakistan regains its pre-eminent status as a trusted Chinese friend. We certainly do not deserve another chance but God seems to like us for some reason, maybe Musharraf's amazing luck is finally rubbing off on Pakistan. Long-term policy objectives should give China a pride of place. PM Chou En Lai told Kissinger in 1971, "do not forget the bridge (Pakistan) you have used, you may have to use it again". Understanding long-term US policy objectives the same concept instantly stands good for Pakistan's relation with the US, being less bitter about being "abandoned" would help us pursue a more mature friendship with the US. Our best interests are served by not "making inveterate friends or inveterate foes among nations", to quote the first US President George Washington in his farewell address to the nation.

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ence to India which mainly used Soviet armaments but the attrition rate would definitely affect Pakistan which wholly relied on the US. In fact we would have faced a catastrophe if China had not stepped in quickly to fill the breach.

During the intervening years American economic aid continued to the tune of plus/minus US \$ 100 million annually. Nixon, a long-time friend of Pakistan, somewhat circumvented the emerging US policy imperatives in 1969 on becoming US President by offering a one-time military aid package to replenish badly needed spares. Pakistan provided the silent stepping stone for the greatest diplomatic initiative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nixon's historic opening to China. Despite the so-called US "tilt" towards Pakistan in 1971, secret documents recently released confirm that the US was resigned to accepting that Pakistan

the UN in support of the Soviet Union. Bhutto (and later Gen Zia) made it to the western hit-list (Kissinger to Bhutto in 1976 "we will make a horrible example out of you!") because of our efforts to go nuclear. By 1979 Gen Zia (and by extension Pakistan) had become international pariah because of the Bhutto hanging. The Soviet adventure in Afghanistan in late 1976 made everything topsy-turvy, the US love-fest with India went on hold. Afghanistan was a wonderful opportunity for Pakistan but we not only botched it, we managed to convert it into an albatross around our necks. For the record, Pakistan was serving its own interests in Afghanistan, and in fact still is. Our interests simply coincided with that of the US. Could we afford Soviet forces parked on our borders with the warm waters of the Arabian Sea (a Czarist dream) an open temptation only a helicopter

leaders' priorities were to make their own and their children's future bright. In 1964 in the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) we frequently pushed a "Morris Minor" car because the owner could not afford a car battery (a common-enough occurrence for an honest field-grade officer), we are now supposed to swallow the canard that his sons either inherited part of Fort Knox or had George Soros as an uncle! Accountability notwithstanding, nobody asks where did the billions of US dollars from CIA (and from other countries) go, only a pittance reaching the Mujahideen fighting in the field?

As a so-called front-line State in the Reagan-esque fight of "good against evil" in Afghanistan we basked in the adulation showered by the west, putting our relationship with China on a back-burner. Instead of the "don't call us, we'll call


that the US President's certification would be withheld if the nuclear route was continued to be pursued, bringing the Presler Amendment for anti-nuclear sanctions into automatic effect. When the aid dried up with the sanctions, we felt betrayed! Why the surprise? We had a chance to redeem things during the Gulf War but the "strategic defiance" concept was the mother of all blunders! Egypt was forgiven its debt of over US \$ 12 billion, Pakistan which had more troops facing Iraq close to the action in the Gulf War were not forgiven a penny. Chagai ensured we descended rapidly in western favour, with Kargil we skidded much faster down the slippery slope.

The "conspiracy theory" that the US is somehow inimical to our existence is a load of hogwash, quoting from the same Chester Bowles' May 21 Memo about US objectives, viz, para 1 (3), to achieve

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



THIS PHOTORIAL HAS BEEN SENT BY AZIZ AMIRUL FROM UTTARA. WE WOULD LIKE MORE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUR READERS. PLEASE SEND US YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR PHOTORIAL.

Disgusting drain

Semi-solid garbage waste and battery residues from nearby motor workshops have turned a number of drains in Uttara into a perfect mosquito breeding ground, for diseases like dengue, malaria etc. Residents of this area have no choice but to bear this nuisance. What does the city corporation have to say about such irregularities in disposing waste and cleaning drains and dustbins?

### Orchestrated plot

I have been amused by the tensions at the political and public levels over the border incident. The reactions are but a natural demonstration of nationalistic aspirations on both sides. I cannot find fault with observations made by the readers on either side. Any attempt by an individual to knock sense into the other will be, at best, futile.

However, has anyone ever thought that this could be an orchestrated plot to gain political ground at the cost of 18 to 20 lives? The Awami League has defended a constant barrage of "pro-Indian" sentiments from the opposition for as long as the party has been alive. Fresh elections have come upon us and the opposition appears to have rallied around this issue in order to downplay the significance of the current government.

In order to diffuse this perceived alliance, how difficult would it be for the high powered keepers of the governments to organise a fiasco that would alleviate the sticky pro-Indian notion attributed to the AL? Surely 18 lives would be a cheap price to pay for the greater benefit of perpetuating and ensuring the success of AL in the coming elections and the continued support of the Indian government.

This rings true when one pon-

ders upon the way the BSF men were set-up as sitting ducks. Their fate appears to have been sealed from the time the operation might have been masterminded.

I am certain both sides will now indulge in nonsensical rhetoric. Rest assured the AL will use this opportunity to fight back the opposition with greater fervour. But the fact remains that public sentiment will reach new heights resulting in a neutralising effect on the opposition's claims over AL.

So far such a plan appears to be playing well into the hands of the generally sentimental public. If such is the case, I congratulate the masterminds that came up with such an ingenious plot. If only we could utilise these energies for the development of our country!

Bakhtiar S. Hafeez

USIA, on e-mail

### Nothing new

This issue of border crisis with India is not anything new. India has been refusing to resolve these issues for many years, even after there had been an agreement to solve this problem in 1974. Attacks by the BSF have killed 415 civilians and 10 BDR soldiers in the last 25 years. The BSF men have attacked Bangladeshi villages and taken away valuables.

Through these acts India has

been showing its aggressive nature towards its small and peaceful neighbour, Bangladesh. As the world becomes more open-minded, aggression is being more and more detested. History now identifies rulers like Alexander and Chengis Khan as tyrants.

We are pleased that India helped us in our Liberation War in 1971. But we cannot forget that when the Indian army left Bangladesh it took away valuable things from our country.

India is responsible for the border crisis. It is the result of long-time negligence of the border treaty of 1974. For some strange reasons India is not solving its border problems. It is time it did so.

Sazzad Khan

Arlington, USA on e-mail

### Friend in need?

We are pained to see in your esteemed newspaper the photographs of the BDR withdrawing from Padua. When the territory is claimed to be in Bangladesh, why could the government not resist pressure from India to withdraw from its own territory?

Our foreign secretary has said that a "move towards peaceful solution reflects good neighbourliness and cordial relations between Bangladesh and India". Is it good

neighbourliness to give up our own territory to India, which has occupied it for the last 30 years? India has dilly-dallied about settling the agreement signed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and Indira Gandhi in 1974.

Is this an example of traditional close friendly ties? Besides, Indians also violated our air space in Kurigram. How can we maintain our integrity and sovereignty in the face of such provocation? Why did India drag the border dispute to Kurigram instead of limiting it to Padua?

Golam Md Faruk

Dhaka

### Computerised billing service

The BTB continues to hit the headlines at regular intervals. Now it is the abrupt inability to prepare lakhs of computerised telephone bills since January, due to a breach of contract with the private contracting firm. The emergency job will now be handled by the BUET computer centre.

There are negative implications for the computer business industry in the private sector. The role of BCS under such situations is not clear. How is this sector being encouraged to expand its services in the government and other sectors? To bring back confidence in

the private sector, the episode needs to be clarified satisfactorily, so that private computer companies continue to enjoy the confidence of the clients.

AH

Dhaka

### Plunderers Ltd?

Orion Infusions Limited, a public limited company, declared cash dividend four years ago at the annual general meeting of share holders but till date a dividend has not be paid due to paucity of cash. I believe Taka 100 invested for one share seven years ago in Orion, is worth Taka 26 now. It is unfortunate to observe that the retired general who as chairman of Orion Infusion, declared a dividend which is dead, making share holders half dead.

Many companies raise capital from public money but they continue to deprive share holders by not declaring dividends for years. As a humble share holder in several dozen public limited companies and mutual funds, I am constrained to suggest that many of these companies are not public limited but plunderers limited.

Mahbubar Rahman

Bagerhat