

Begum Zia needs to rein them in

No leniency to vengeance-seekers, please!

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia takes oath as the prime minister today in the wake of post-election violence and incidents of minority repression allegedly by activists of her party and components of the four-party alliance. Technically, responsibility for law and order breakdown across the country after the October 1 general election fell on the caretaker government. However, the fact that the untoward incidents could malign the image of the upcoming government before it took over must have weighed with Begum Zia. That's why, taking note of it, she has asked the law enforcement people to take action against the perpetrators before formally ascending to power.

In the first few days or weeks, the next government's actions against the hoodlums, especially the ones in their own ranks, will be under intense public scrutiny. How they fare would greatly influence the public impression about the way the country would be run in the next five years.

The interim administration's hesitancy and its lame-duck approach to the post-election violence were palpable. There has been some downplaying of reported incidents reflecting on communal harmony and finger-pointing, too, that tended to compromise the quality of law enforcement. It could be that the interim government marked holding of the election in as free and fair a manner as possible the cut-off point of its engagement in the affairs of the state. Such last-minute passivity could have encouraged the troublemakers to have things their way.

Within hours of the election results, criminal elements, claiming themselves as supporters of the BNP and the alliance, began asserting control on market places, bus and launch terminals, educational institutes, etc, in the process ousting the so-called AL activists. Some people within the BNP ranks appeared to have lent a tacit support to such takeovers. The AL people have had their days, now is time for the BNP men, they seemed to believe.

We would like to remind these leaders that one wrong could never redress another wrong. The BNP and the alliance have repeatedly said they wanted to establish rule of law and equitable justice in the society. Such a society tolerates people of opposing views and, most importantly, upholds the rights of the religious minorities. The fabulous mandate which the BNP-led alliance has got raises the level of public expectation for responsible governance in the country. Same elements are trying to spoil the alliance's image even before it takes power.

First attacks on journalists

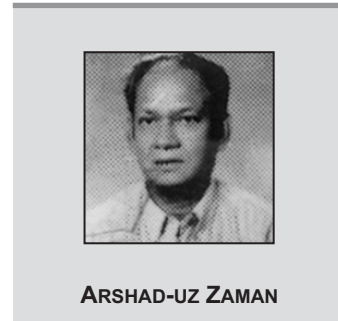
Press bashing JCD hoodlums must be punished

WE have been outraged by two brutal incidents of vendetta being exacted upon journalists on their rounds of duty at the Dhaka and Jahangirnagar University campuses. Reporter Swapna Basu of BSS Bangla Service was beaten blue at the DU campus allegedly by a group of Chhatra Dal workers on Monday. When Prothom Alo photojournalist tried to take a snap of the blatant manhandling episode the hoodlums fell on him in an attempt to snatch his camera. Jugantar photojournalist, similarly intent on taking a photograph of the scene, was threatened with dire consequences. But we are in no mood to pass it off as any conventional act of reprisal because, a journalist has been brutalised and two photojournalists harassed here in the line of duty.

In an earlier incident Jahangirnagar correspondent of Prothom Alo Chokor Malitha was assaulted with staves and gun-bulbs by some Chhatra Dal miscreants near the campus gate. A final year student of JU, his room at Salam-Barkat Hall was ransacked. With serious wounds inflicted on Malitha he landed in a hospital. Simultaneously, they looked for Jahidul Islam, JU correspondent of Bangla daily Jugantar, spewing out invectives, such as: "You have written volumes against us, now it is the turn for retribution".

We take these first bursts of assault on journalists very seriously; for, we think, the perpetrators have acted under the set belief that the upcoming new government would turn a blind eye to their criminal excesses. This tendency has to be ruthlessly nipped in the bud by the new leadership for the simple reason that its escalation would hinder the free and responsible working of the journalist community upon which depends the exercise of press freedom in a full measure much to the benefit of democracy and governance. Let the new leaders of government chastise the wayward JCD elements in public and get a move on to punish them for their misdeeds without any mercy whatsoever. BNP must show that much respect for the free press.

Despair in Palestine-Israel negotiations



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

There is a sentiment of hopelessness descending on the Middle East. The cycle of violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis continues without a let up. In this murderous game Palestinians are bearing the major brunt with the number of killed and injured and houses and property destroyed. And all this under the elusive name of cease-fire.

With the departure of former US President Bill Clinton from the scene nine months ago, the new Republican President George Bush has disengaged from direct involvement in the dispute. Whereas President Bill Clinton carried on dynamic diplomacy by directly involving himself with the main actors of the drama namely Chairman Yasser Arafat of Palestine and successive Israeli Premiers including Ehud

Barak, the predecessor of current hawkish Premier Ariel Sharon. President Clinton had brought the two parties very close to a settlement by directly attacking the heart of the dispute Jerusalem. It is a thousand pities that the parties did not have the courage to make the kind of concessions without which the problem can never be resolved.

Ehud Barak was thrown out by the Israeli electorate because he was unable to resolve the Middle

East crisis the matter on which he had received a resounding victory. Ariel Sharon was elected by the Israeli electorate in order to reestablish security within Israel and her settlements within Palestine. The Israelis do not expect Sharon to establish peace with her Arab neighbours.

It is easy to see how far the Palestinians and the Israelis have moved away from their position of near settlement of the half a century old conflict. Now they are negotiating an ever vanishing cease-fire. Whereas

superpower US, the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC. The terrorist attack cost nearly 7000 lives and caused colossal loss of property. Indeed the monetary edifice of the world has been profoundly shaken. President George Bush vowed to retaliate and built up a world wide coalition in order to punish the reported mastermind of the terrorist operation, Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban regime, which harbours Bin Laden. And the attack is on. The plan appears to oust the rabidly fundamentalist Taliban and replace it with

in the past Yasser Arafat was in contact with Ehud Barak almost on daily basis, he has yet to meet Ariel Sharon. Sharon prefers to deal with Arafat through his deputy Shimon Peres. Whereas Arafat had become a very frequent visitor to the White House, he has yet to be invited since George Bush took office. There appears to be some kind of movement since the ghastly events of 11 September, when terrorists razed to the ground two symbols of

a coalition within Afghanistan, with former Afghan King Ziaheer Shah at the head. In order to achieve her military objective the US has assembled a formidable military machine with warships, armed fighters and a great air fire power. That Taleban is truly friendless is evident from the statement of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, whose intelligence outfit Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) was the creator of

Uzbekistan, a neighbour of Afghanistan, from where the former Soviet Union conducted her war against Afghanistan. The US is keen to take on board the Arabs, because of Islamic sensitivity. The first Arab leader to visit President Bush at the White House was King Abdallah of Jordan, who pressed for a Middle East settlement as a pre-condition to Arab participation in the coalition. That would mean meaningful concession by Israel. This is a condition

weeping Chief Minister of Kashmir Abdullah and call from many Indian quarters for strike across the international border. Thus Russia appeared eager to join the coalition prompted no doubt by her ongoing conflict in Chechnya.

As the US forces strike against Afghanistan more particularly targeting the Taleban regime and she is powerfully backed by Britain, the US was attempting to take on board other countries. A decade ago the father of the present President George W. Bush had built up a world wide coalition against Iraq and virtually destroyed that tiny weak country. The punishment goes on till this day. It was easy to single out Iraq because she had invaded and occupied tiny Kuwait, because of her oil wealth.

In the present case there is not a clear enemy except the shadowy Bin Laden and his protector the Taleban regime of Afghanistan. World opinion finds it nearly impossible to accept that impoverished and hungry Afghan people pay a price for their Taleban masters.

Whither Palestine-Israel negotiations? It would seem that the two sides, the US and the UN are going through the motions of negotiations without any hope of achieving any result. The tragedy is that innocent blood is being shed daily.

Arshad-Uz Zaman is a former Ambassador

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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Taleban within Afghanistan following the humiliating withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. President Musharraf in several TV interviews has given the green light to the overthrow of the Taleban regime in Afghanistan. He has even invited a representative of King Ziaheer Shah to Islamabad to hold talks. Pakistan must have come to the conclusion that Taleban is a big liability and it is best to cut her links without further loss of time.

In the effort to build an anti-Taleban coalition the US went to

which appears impossible to be fulfilled.

The building of the coalition arouse various possibilities around the world. Since Pakistan has turned out to be a front line state she has easily obtained lifting of sanctions imposed by the US and so has India. Indeed both states are strongly cooperating with the US since each has its own agenda. India is particularly keen because of cross border raids in Kashmir and there has been a ghastly incident in the recent past. We have seen

OPINION

Absence of resignation culture cripples the big parties

TANVIR AHMED KHAN

By mid day of the second of October Sheikh Hasina should have resigned from the Presidency of the Bangladesh Awami League. She should have accepted the huge mandate given to her party (40% of the votes) and the others by the people of Bangladesh and taken responsibility for the debacle in the election. William Hague of the Conservative party in UK resigned from his leadership position taking full responsibility for the election debacle. The electorates and the members of the Conservative party sympathized with Mr. Hague stating that his leadership was only not responsible for the outcome but that there were other important indicators that contributed to this downfall.

What was important is the highlighting of the democratic culture that prevails in Britain and the commitment to pursue this culture.

In Bangladesh this culture has not yet developed. Sheikh Hasina could have pioneered the beginning of this culture but again she has missed the bus. Maftuz Anam in his commentary of October 7 quite rightly points out to Khaleda Zia the opportunity she has right now to recognize Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Father of the Nation. If she doesn't she would miss the bus as did Sheikh Hasina in the past and in the present circumstances.

The advisors in any party are very crucial to the existence of good leadership. A few stalwarts of the Awami League might say, "This is a different country than the UK". "We are in different circumstances than that of Britain". These stalwarts did

not recognize the advice given by the genuine Awami Leaguers (those who love Bangabandhu and Awami League so dearly) that by listening to these sermons they could have done better.

The message that the electorates have given this time is one of rule of law to be established in the country. They have come out loud and clear that the excesses that some of the party stalwarts were involved in along with their children were below the belt. It was not at all acceptable. This message is not being internalized even now by the incumbent leadership of the Awami League. If they think that Awami League is their own property then they are absolutely and grossly mistaken. This party has come to stay as a grassroots people's party and it will be there for many more years to uphold finer principles as earlier, which is its strength.

If the leaders are calling foul to the whole electoral process they should think twice. They had the prerogative not to have run for elections until an appropriate caretaker government of their choice was in place to hold a free and fair election. To state now that the election was "apparently free but not fair" is crying over spilled milk. To take recourse to "movement" outside the parliament is again taking an undemocratic position. The High Court has been reposed with the responsibility to take complaints and resolve any anomalies. They are presently not even thinking of that.

While everybody, both local and international observers, accept the outcome as reasonable a few party stalwarts, most of them who have lost and some who had won, are into

a dangerous game. They don't realize what they are doing to the party. The party is over everybody and the country is above party. This simple statement seems to be too difficult for them to understand.

In the last five years they exploited the sentiments of the Awami Leaguers who love Bangabandhu so dearly. If you opened the BTV for the first twenty minutes they would be eulogizing Bangabandhu as the property of Awami League. That Bangabandhu is the Father of the Nation and is for everybody irrespective of creed, colour, gender or age has not entered their mind now not to speak of the previous times.

What right did they have to exploit the sentiments of those who love Bangabandhu dearly? The ordinary workers cried near the party office after the election debacle, reflecting much more emotions than they customarily do when their near and dear ones die, and even chased a few "loved" ones for bringing shame to the party. This time around, the wrath of the ordinary Awami Leaguers had been contained but in future one should be careful not to abuse the warm-hearted sentiments of the genuine Awami fan.

So the bottom-line suggestion is while the time is ripe try to contain yourselves and get into the bandwagon of democratic culture. You would be helping yourself immensely and at the same time helping the country to ride the waves of prosperity of the third millennium. We do not want to miss anymore buses!

Eighth parliament: Key to historic reconciliation

M.SHAFIULLAH

WHAT divides Bangladesh society broadly into two is not election, not even pro-liberation and anti-liberation forces but wrong reasons.

Without beating about bush it could be said that 15 August 1975 was the day of the great divide. How the Founder and President of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, even women and children were bathed in the orgy of blood needs no reminder to recall the tragic event. Subsequent merciless killing of the four national leaders, in the captivity of the same killers, on 3rd November in that year just unfolded another ugly face of terror. The rest of the episode is too well-known to recapitulate as to how in the years that followed the self confessed killers were rehabilitated in the Diplomatic service of Bangladesh.

The verdict of the voters on 1st October 2001 upset the apple cart of the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina may have reason to doubt that the murder trial of her father and kin would hang in the balance during the fresh term of BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia beginning this month. Two-thirds majority of four-party alliance in the eighth parliament which could make her invincible, has further deepened suspicion of Sheikh Hasina in this direction.

In the perception of BNP, Zia was deprived of his due recognition under Awami League rule after liberation of Bangladesh. This view has many adherents even beyond BNP. In their zeal to restore Ziaur

Rahman, founder of BNP, to his place of pride, Khaleda Zia and her followers refused to recognize Sheikh Mujib as the Father of the Nation. BNP should realize that for his historic proclamation of the Independence of Bangladesh in the name of "our beloved leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" and being a valiant sector commander of our Liberation War the name of Ziaur Rahman is assured in the annals of Bangladesh. None can diminish his stature for playing historical role nor place him above Bangabandhu.

The people of Bangladesh in their massive mandate handed over key of the eighth parliament to BNP chief to open the door of reconciliation to the historic wrongs if she decides to show magnanimity in her magnificent victory. Discarding previous taboo Khaleda Zia had already showed a positive gesture in mentioning the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman among the great leaders of the soil in appropriate order in her address to the nation on the eve of election day on BTV and Bangladesh Betar. Following the landslide victory her appeal not to show disrespect to portrait [of Bangabandhu] was well appreciated by the people. It is apparent that she set the ball rolling in right direction.

If it could be envisaged that Begum Khaleda Zia assures that the on going trial of murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would follow the normal course of law without let or hindrance from her administration would reflect her statesmanship to set at rest all speculation on this score. In the same vein if the BNP takes cogni-

sance of Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation and the new Prime Minister visits Tungipara the whole cycle of misgivings will disappear in the thin air. Not only it will take winds out of the Awami League sail but also BNP will emerge larger than life in the national politics for years to come.

Awami League's suicidal agenda of rejection of 1st October general elections lock, stock and barrel, boycott of Parliament and agitation on the street will hold no water under such a scenario. For while the memory serves AL chief is just going back from her opt repeated pledge to make Parliament the centre of national politics.

With a two-thirds majority in the eighth parliament and an overwhelming hartal-fatigued citizens on the side of peace, BNP can well discard the above line of argument for positive reconciliation conjured up by a feeble writer who served Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Information Officer from late 1972 to mid 1975 but in doing so BNP would miss a historic opportunity to add a golden chapter to the history of this land and to BNP itself.

As of now, in an inexorable process of history, Bangladesh is entering the point of no return at a crucial time when the world is at war on terrorism with devastating fallout on poor and fragile economy of countries like Bangladesh. In a silent revolution people empowered Begum Khaleda Zia to reverse the process.

M.Shafiullah, former Ambassador to Libya was Information Officer to Bangabandhu.

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.



STAR PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Clean up the mess

Garbage and bundled waste paper have been dumped on the public thoroughfare in Gulshan occupying the entire sidewalk. Those who have done this have no sense of civic duty and are totally uncaring about the inconvenience this dumping is causing to pedestrians and residents of this area. The authorities concerned are also responsible for failing in upkeep of the roads. How long would the city dwellers of this city have to put up with these problems?

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Recognising the Father of the Nation

I write in response to Mrs Murshed's "Letter to the Editor" (October 8) regarding *The Daily Star* Mahfuz Anam's appeal to the prime minister in waiting to recognise Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation. The writer termed Mr Anam's appeal presumptuous, patronising and premature. However, it was Mrs Murshed's sermon that was unjustified while Mr Anam's comments seemed necessary and commendable. Terming Mr Anam's commentary presumptuous suggests that Mrs Murshed has forgotten that the BNP did not recognise Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation for the last five years. Given this unfortunate fact, it is hardly presumptuous to assume that the prime minister designate will 'disregard history and the sentiment of the people'. She has done exactly this for the last five years.

On the same note, I wonder on what basis Mrs Murshed has established the 'fact' that all 'Bangladeshis regardless of political preference respect Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation and acknowledge the position which is his due'. This, I find, highly presumptuous. It also makes me wonder how Mrs Murshed has gained such an insight into the minds of those who opposed the creation of Bangladesh.

Perhaps Mr Anam's commentary was patronising. But surely, Mrs Murshed is not suggesting that 'nobility of purpose' which she refers to is inappropriate. While everyone understands and appreciates the 'imperatives and exigencies' that influence political decision making, if Mrs Murshed is suggesting that this justifies pettiness and negative politics, this is indeed sad. It is even more upsetting that Mrs Murshed

holds the view that 'public exhortations to "do the right thing" can have little effect on their actions.' Let us not forget that political governments are there to serve the public after all. Whether Mr Anam's appeal is heard or not, it is his responsibility to make such appeals. To suggest that Mr Anam should give up on this endeavour because of his lack of success with the past administration is irresponsible on Mrs Murshed's part. Lastly, I do not see Mrs Murshed's justification for calling Mr Anam's appeal premature. The BNP will form the next government within a day or two and such appeals must be made now while the BNP is still formulating its first wave of policies. No purpose will be served by waiting till once the damage has been done. In conclusion, I would like to join Mr Anam in appealing to Begum Zia to recognise Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation. Your party has been given an overwhelming mandate by the people to take our country forward. Please do not engage in the negative politics that has plagued our country in the past. In this regard, I would like to say that the early signs of the government in waiting have been very positive and this is encouraging. I hope this continues.

Shameran Abed, on e-mail

Hats off to your excellent commentary appealing to the BNP leader Begum Khaleda Zia to recognise Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation. The commentary is timely, forthright and appropriate. Once Begum Zia recognises Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation, the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina becomes duty bound to reciprocate in equal measure. Hence, such a good step can lead to quantum leap in good governance and halt the nation from nose diving towards

virtual Hara Kiri.

You have so thoughtfully indicated all the steps Begum Zia has already initiated like visiting the mazar of Bangabandhu a few years back and also the recent exhortations to the activists of BNP to refrain from showing disrespect to the Portrait of Bangabandhu, not to mention her salutations to Bangabandhu on the night of Sept 30, 2001 during her address to the nation. Hope that Begum Zia accepts your request and lead the country towards democracy.

SY Jamil Chittagong, on e-mail

"Misreading the October elections"

Rehman Sobhan's article ("Misreading the October Elections", DS 7 October) has some enigmatic statements and an innuendo. For example, his first para refers to "...political crisis". If the AL, in its finite wisdom, opposes the election outcome on the infantile argument of "crude rigging" (is there sophisticated rigging?), then it, not the country, is in crisis. Mr. Sobhan apparently recognises this for he refers to the AL "going down a political blind alley...of dead-end politics" if it persists in this irrational behaviour. Some evidence (Speaker Hamid's flip-flop on swearing) suggests that AL leadership is moving away from this self-defeating position. Barking up the wrong tree annoys the audience and tires the dog. Mr. Sobhan refers to BNPs political coalition "...which carried them to a decisive electoral rather than political victory" (Lessons for the AL). What does this hair splitting statement mean? For clarity, this is on par with the AL's assertion that the polls were free but not fair. In saying that "terrorism, corruption and a partisan administra-

tion...were alive and well under Ershad and the last BNP". Mr. Sobhan does not carry his chronology back far enough. These three qualities were displayed in abundance by the first AL government 1972-1975. Is he implying that just because previous administrations were corrupt, it was ok for the Hasina government not only to be likewise, but also exceed its predecessors in venality? One sincerely hopes not.

Mr. Sobhan rightly draws attention to the relative and absolute improvement in the AL's votes last October but he makes too much of this achievement. BNP's alliance strategy paid handsome dividends partly because of what it stood for. But even more because of AL's actual--and not only perception as Mr. Sobhan contends-- of an extremely unsavoury record of misgovernance before which its substantial achievements (food autarky, low inflation) paled into insignificance.

Some idea of the AL's misgovernance can be gleaned indirectly from the extensive remedies Mr. Sobhan prescribes for the AL's maladies (Lessons for the AL). After taking 'stock of the changing trends in electoral arithmetic' so as to "...restructure its appeal for the new voters in 2006", the AL should "...project itself as credible in the new Parliament" through "serious and continuous homework". This task of "...rethinking and rebuilding the party" will require "...a serious self-assessment" so as to "...reinventorise grassroots organisation, introduce professionalism in its political strategy and party organisation...invest enormous creative thinking through drawing in expert advice in designing future agenda". The AL, its work cut out, would be wise to seek Mr. Sobhan's advice in this Herculean task.

Mr. Sobhan's formula, distilled common-sense, is unexceptional. The BNP, if smart, will immediately appropriate it so as to govern wisely and well and get re-elected. Such competitiveness will be good for both parties and the public. A general losing a war is usually sacked. Mr. Sobhan is discreetly silent about the personnel changes the AL needs to make to implement his formula. It is doubtful if the old discredited old guard can deliver. Fresh blood "with a clean image" is needed. Will this be found and used?

Most of Mr. Sobhan's article is reasonably clinical and dispassionate. But he shows his pique at the polls outcome by stating that "...time will reveal how far the bias of the caretaker administration may have influenced the outcome of the ..election" (underscoring supplied). Is this innuendo warranted? Mr. Sobhan should either substantiate this assertion or withdraw it. Rizwan Rahman, on e-mail

Irresponsible

It is a painful truth that in the recent election the cost of circulation (banner, poster, leaflet, photographs, bribe, processions, food allocation etc.) maintained by hundreds of candidates totaled to about 900 crore taka. As one of the poorest countries in the world this type extravagant expenditure was nothing but a poor display of the candidates' lack of sense and balance. Did the candidates know that with that amount of money an industry (garments, textile, fishery, animal husbandry) may be set up at each union in the country. In a nation where about 2.4 crore people are unemployed such irresponsible act by the rich candidates is unexpected and frustrating. Imtiaz Ahmed Immigration Consultant, Dhaka