

Moyeen's heartening comment

Khaleda government must do better than last time

What is, perhaps, his first public comment after assuming office of the minister for information and broadcasting in the new government, the physicist turned politician Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan while visiting the Bangladesh Television (BTV) premises said his government would not use BTV for party propaganda. It is very heartening first statement from a man who will be in charge of the state media for the foreseeable future. It is of course easier said than done. How will he handle his cabinet colleagues who will start ringing him for his camera and news crew, and then start complaining when he will not do (if he wants to implement his declared policy) as requested? How will he handle the pressure from his party high-ups who will want to see their faces on the small screen, not to mention the pressure from the PMO for "proper" coverage of the Prime Minister herself?

The reason we have decided to comment so early in the day on the work of the information ministry is because it is this ministry, whose doings or over-doings set the image of the government as a whole. Sheikh Hasina's government did two very positive things in the media field: disbanding the government owned newspapers and giving out licences, for the first time, to private TV channels. Yet her good deeds got totally wiped out in the public mind because of the widespread misuse of the state radio and TV. The setting up of the commission on public broadcasting and the subsequent suppression of its report is another example of the former government's good start being throttled because of the rise of regressive thinking to replace the initial liberal ones.

We do not want Dr. Moyeen's ideas, assuming that he is sincere and we have no reason to think otherwise, to meet the same fate. For him to succeed he will have to fight both his cabinet colleagues and the publicity-hungry party high-ups. He can only win this battle, given the reality of our party politics, if the Prime Minister is on his side. In other words, at the earliest of opportunity, the information minister must sit with his government and party head and convince her of the line to follow. A clear directive from the PM will keep the publicity-seeking cabinet and party colleagues at bay. She will have to be reminded that both the two previous governments' failure that includes her first one to formulate a credible state media policy caused enormous damage to their public support. That failure must be avoided from the start. She will have to be convinced that state property is not party property and the former is meant for public welfare and not party welfare. Majority party leaders in the past confused party interest with public interest thinking that since they have the majority support so whatever they do is in public interest, even using the state media for party propaganda.

We wish the new information minister all success in his just declared policy. If he really means what he said and sincerely tries to implement it, then he will find the independent print media, especially this newspaper, totally by his side.

Price rise in post-election spending world

Government must protect the voter

The most sensitive problem of them all is rearing its head as the alliance in power steps into its governing shoes. Price rise has hit the market and the BNP led combine has no option but to try to tame the most feared devil first. Price rise is the worst way to begin a fresh political journey.

Some of the causes are probably linked to the immediate situation after the polls. In fact, supply to the markets is usually disrupted after any polls as business takes a second place to public concern about what happens next and who forms the government. This is to be expected.

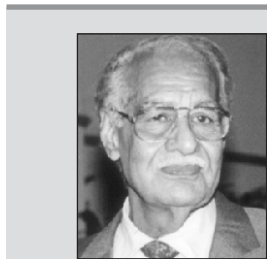
But this situation was exacerbated by the pre and post polls violence. As a result, the usual suppliers, anxious and scared, failed to keep the chain intact and the price index also bumped up.

However, the increase in the market isn't limited to the consumables only and the index has increased across the board. This probably means that money supply has gone up and when that isn't accompanied by increased production the answer is a price increase that doesn't support buying capacity and threatens to be a long-term pain.

The culture of spending which has overwhelmed the electoral process in our country does more to encourage black money and accumulation of black wealth than most other factors. Spending beyond limit during polls is actually a punishable offence but we seem to have accepted this process as part of the price we must pay for being allowed to vote. Unfortunately, this price is steep and the voters, especially the less well off, are now having to bear the burden. The inherent unfairness of this process has to be noted because elections are most about ordinary voters rather than candidates and political parties. That message always gets lost.

But the situation has changed even if it's only a little. The voters' voice is more assertive today and one assertion is that elections can't directly or otherwise adversely affect their life. And that includes price rise. Which is why a systemic change of electoral democracy, which protects the voter, is emerging as a legitimate demand. One may ignore the raised voices but they can't be shut down.

Playing politics on the hoof



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

THIS is the worst of times. This is also the best of times. Both New Delhi and Islamabad should utilise the opportunity to come closer to each other. Even the core issue of Kashmir cannot come in the way because Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has himself said that Kashmir will be taken up after "the dust" on Afghanistan "settles down." And if America is to be believed, the dust will take several years to settle down since it is going to be a long-drawn war to root out the evil of terrorism.

That being the scenario, Kashmir takes a back seat. It may not be out of order to take up other pending matters between India and Pakistan. Since Kashmir has so many ramifications and touches the Taliban and their supporters in one way or the other, it is better to keep it aside for the time being.

Such attempts have been made in the past. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto once suggested to me at Rawalpindi that the Kashmir problem be frozen. This was a month before the Shimla conference in 1972. In an interview to me, he said that it was not incumbent upon him or his generation to solve the problem. It is the same

interview in which he described the line of control (LoC) as "a line of peace." But when asked to confirm the remark, he wriggled out of it at the Shimla conference.

Another thought has come from his daughter, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, now living outside Pakistan. She is said to have remarked that Kashmir is not solvable; the problem has to be managed. Her observation of not being solvable is understandable because neither Pakistan can take Kashmir from India forcibly, nor can India

help us go over one impediment after another.

Perhaps Secretary of State Powell's visit to India and Pakistan has the making of such an effort. He wants to prepare the ground. But the suddenness in President Bush's instructions to him to take the trip within days is a point of worry. Does America suspect that India is up to something?

Vajpayee in his letter to Bush made it clear that New Delhi's cup of patience was full. Has Washington inferred -- and it may have some

Musharraf's condemnation of the attack at a press conference goes some way to mollify Vajpayee. Musharraf gives the impression that America must have prodded him to do so. For, he hailed in the past such acts as freedom struggle.

Whatever the government is mulling over, the action should not be beyond the LoC. India is known for forbearance, not misadventure. Any retaliation at this time may turn into a war within war which even the friendliest elements may find it hard to appreciate. Pakistan can also

tackled after they had settled with Osama Bin Laden.

Such a stand is reprehensible. Some British papers have criticised Blair for accepting Pakistan as an ally when the Taliban is its "product." *The Sunday Independent* has gone to the extent of saying, "Our friends are killers and crooks... We are playing politics on the hoof and allying ourselves to some of the nastiest butchers around." Blair's explanation that Britain condemns "terrorism in all its forms" is not adequate. And India can continue to

is the removal of Lt Gen Aziz and Lt Gen Usmani from their posts because both have the reputation of belonging to the fundamentalist school of thought. But they are not alone. The late Zia-ul-Haq had nourished a fundamental fringe within the army. They are now colonels and brigadiers. Their number is not small. No doubt, Musharraf though has been given added protection by the CIA, has a major problem on his hand. He has to fight fundamentalists within the armed forces, the administration and certain parts of the country. A sizeable section of the people in Pakistan may be behind him.

But this is all right as far as it goes. Musharraf has to lessen his problems. Better relations with India will help him do that. How can he evoke sympathy, much less confidence, when he goes on saying that the militants in Kashmir are freedom fighters? They are killing the innocent in the name of religion. The militants in Kashmir, like those in Afghanistan, have given bad name to Islam.

Kashmir, Musharraf should have realised by now, is a symptom, not the disease. The disease is mistrust which has plagued the two countries from the day they were born in August 1947. Let both gain confidence by taking the problems other than Kashmir first. They may be able to reach some agreement.

Both sides must realise that our subcontinent is a backward region -- economically, socially and morally.

If they continue to waste their limited resources in confrontation as they have been doing, very soon it may be too late for us to span the gulf between the two countries.

Kuldip Nayyar is a leading Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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give it to Pakistan peacefully. She has not elaborated the management part.

Once Kashmir goes down in priority, the two countries can initiate discussion on other problems, including the bomb and the reduction of forces. In fact, there are so many problems and irritants which have piled up in the last 54 years. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee probably had some of them in mind when he told the Pakistan President on the phone not to concentrate on Kashmir alone. Islamabad does not seem to appreciate the impact that the solution of even a single outstanding problem would have on the people of the two countries. There will be a gush of goodwill which can

other evidence -- that India contemplates taking certain serious measures to stop militancy from across the border? Musharraf's out-of-the-blue call to Vajpayee strengthens such a belief. Even Russian President Vladimir Putin's 15-minute conversation with Vajpayee on the phone suggests something similar. Knowing Moscow's proximity to New Delhi, Washington wanted Russia to find out what was in India's mind.

There is no doubt that the Jaish-e-Muhammed's attack on the assembly building at Srinagar has made Vajpayee really angry. He was already upset over Musharraf's warning to India to "lay off." The attack has added fuel to the fire.

retaliate. The very thought is too ominous to contemplate.

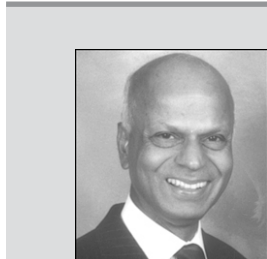
Prime Minister Tony Blair, who condemned the Jaish-e-Muhammed's attack on the assembly building during his speech at the House of Commons, was at pains to explain to the Indian leaders in New Delhi that their travails were understandable. But they could not be taken up at this time as their front stage for operation was Pakistan.

New Delhi has not liked Blair's defence. It was pointed out to him that the West did not wake up when India had drawn its attention to the fact that Pakistan was at the back of terrorism in Kashmir and other parts of India. But Blair was frank enough to say that everything else would be

talk about the West's double standards. But it has to stop at that. It is an equal world but it is ruled by the "might is right" maxim. And as for being equal, some people are more equal than others as Orwell said. The opportunist role Islamabad has played, first in creating a force like the Taliban and then abandoning it, is clear to the international community. And one can see how sentiments against the Musharraf regime are running high in his country. Protests in different parts of Pakistan show that the fundamentalists Musharraf coddled have come out on the streets. He has created a Frankenstein's monster and he is now the worst sufferer.

Apparently, the immediate fallout

Give democracy a chance



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

AFTER such a violent election campaign in which more than one hundred people lost their lives, some of us who belong to the Bangladeshi community in Madrid expected the worst on the election day. But everything went smoothly. It made us very happy to watch the BBC television coverage of the event. We saw thousands of men and women all across the country queuing up patiently outside the polling stations to cast their votes.

Except several minor incidents, everything worked well. We all breathed a sigh of relief when it was over. At last, we thought, democracy in Bangladesh has come of age. We were proud of our country's achievement.

Later in the evening, (four hours difference between the European continental time and Bangladeshi time), as we followed the counting of votes on the Internet, it became clear to us that the four-party alliance was heading for a landslide victory. (By the way, the BRAC web page gave by far the best coverage of the event). Quite naturally, the BNP supporters among us were overjoyed. The AL supporters were not so happy but accepted the outcome with good grace. Even I, as an independent senior citizen, felt happy because I thought, such a decisive victory would open the door for a peaceful transition of power, which is one of the prerequisites for good democratic governance. I came back home and started writing my column with the words, "Three cheers for democracy in Bangladesh".

Unfortunately, it had to be scrapped. I am deeply saddened by the subsequent events. The AL has not only rejected the outcome of the election results but also accused the caretaker government of vote rigging on a gigantic scale and demanded wholesale cancellation of the results. It has also

announced massive protest demonstrations from 5-9 October and served an ultimatum on the government to order fresh polls. The AL leader Sheikh Hasina threatened a "non co-operation movement", if her demands were not met. Has the AL got any valid constitutional reasons to resort to such an action? Has the election not been free and fair? Has the caretaker government broken the rules of the game?

If I remember correctly, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution provides for a neutral, non-party caretaker government to take office three months before a general election. Its mandate is to hold free, fair and impartial election in a peaceful atmosphere. It is indeed a tall order. Even then, it is a brilliant idea for the consolidation of democracy in a poor underdeveloped country like ours, where even the concept of political morality is virtually non-existent.

I do not know who Justice Latifur Rahman is. But I can say without any hesitation that he has done a remarkable job in such a short period of time. In order to ensure impartiality, immediately after taking office, he dismantled the outgoing government's hold on the government machinery by transferring senior 'partisan' civil servants from key positions and reorganised the police hierarchy. In order to restore some semblance of law and order in the country, he seized as many illegal arms as possible and rounded up many known political goons. When the caretaker government found that it was not enough to stop inter-party warfare because of the presence of armed BNP and AL supporters, it did not hesitate to deploy more than 60,000 troops all over the country. The caretaker government also did everything within its power to ensure freedom of speech, and the press and the rule of law. It did all this to create an atmosphere in which free, transparent and fair elections could be held. The heavy turnout of women and

young voters bears testimony to the fact that the caretaker government was largely successful in creating this atmosphere.

The BBC (who have no axe to grind) coverage of the election also conveyed the same message. Here, the Election Commission must be congratulated upon for successfully putting in place a huge well-coordinated election machinery all across the nation to conduct the elections fairly and efficiently. This was indeed a formidable task. Finally, in order to avoid vote-rigging, the caretaker government invited independent monitoring teams from home and abroad to observe voting while it was being performed.

According to some reports there were more than three hundred thousand local observers and several hundred foreign monitors from Canada, Japan, the European Union, the United States and other countries. According to a press report, President Carter, because of the September 11 attack, finally decided not to come to Bangladesh as a distinguished neutral observer. Now the question is: Has the caretaker government fulfilled its constitutional obligations or has it failed?

I understand from press reports that only about 150 voting centres out of an approximate total of 30,000 centres were suspended, which is less than 1 per cent of the total. The Election Commission has given a clean certificate as far as the overall election results are concerned.

They have been considered as valid, reliable and legitimate. According to the BBC, the international monitors have said that the voting was mostly free and fair.

Then what is the problem? Why is the AL not prepared to accept the people's collective will? Does it realise that by this irrational act, the AL and its leader Sheikh Hasina will plunge the country into a destructive period of social disorder, political

turmoil and economic instability? Have we not had enough of that?

Does Sheikh Hasina realise that it would not take much "to turn the

LETTER FROM EUROPE

My appeal to the leader of the opposition would be: Madam, if you care for Bangladesh, please do not call hartals, do not boycott Parliament. Give democracy a chance. Remember what Walter Lippmann said, "In a democracy, the opposition is not only tolerated as constitutional, but must be maintained because it is INDISPENSABLE".

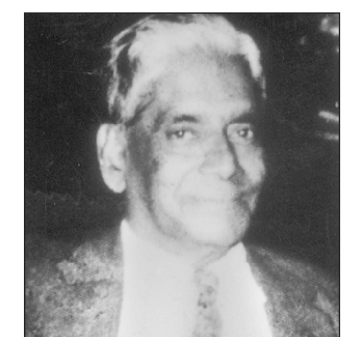
Lest we forget Justice Ibrahim

MESBAH-US-SALEHEEN

TODAY is the 35th anniversary of death of late Justice M. Ibrahim, a man of courage, who stood alone for democracy during the military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan in early sixties. He was not very much known to the present generation, but his contribution to establish the right of Bengalis of this part of the world will be remembered as long as our beloved country will live. Born in an old aristocratic family of village Bishnupur under Sadarpur Upazila of Faridpur district, he passed Matriculation in first division from Barisal Zilla School. He joined the Non-Cooperation Movement and also took active part in the Khilafat movement against the British Raj during his college and university years. The famous politician-cum-litterateur late Abul Monsur Ahmad described Justice Ibrahim in his memoirs *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor* (pp. 21), as their leader when he (Mr. Ahmed) was a student of B.A. class and was residing in the Secretariat Muslim Hostel (now the Medical College Hospital). Justice Ibrahim was then a student of B.L. class. In the Conference of the Khilafat Movement held at the Anshan Monzil of Dhaka in 1920, Justice Ibrahim acted as the leader of the volunteers. He also participated in the movement for the emancipation of intellectuals (1926-1938) in East Bengal, organised by young, liberal and progressive intellectuals of the time like Abul Hossain, Kazi Abdul Wadud, Kazi Motahar Hossain, Abul Fazl and others. This movement was an early and direct impact of the establishment of the University of Dhaka in 1921. After obtaining B.L. degree from the University of Dhaka he started his

legal profession first at Faridpur and then at Dhaka. He was very popular among the Sardars of Dhaka, notably the famous Kader Sardar and the Majed Sardar and the Dhakaites, who affectionately used to call him Manik Ukil (a gem of lawyers).

During his illustrious career, he served as Additional District Judge and District Judge in Greater Jessore and Barisal Districts. He was elevated to the East Pakistan High Court in 1950 and became vice-chancellor of the University of Dhaka in 1956. I was told by senior



lawyers that his judgments were well thought out. Many of his judgments are still referred to by the distinguished lawyers in their arguments. He joined President Ayub Khan's cabinet and became minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs in 1958 and remained there till April 1962. He was a man of wide vision, who wanted to change the political system. His resignation from Ayub's ministry should remain an example of courage to us.

As a minister, he submitted a note to the Constitutional Subcommittee emphasizing and pointing out his arguments on the autonomy of East Pakistan. Stressing his points, he wrote a letter to President Ayub on May 6,

1961, which has been quoted by the then very senior civil servant of Pakistan, Mr. Altaf Gauhar in his book *Ayub Khan: The First Military Ruler of Pakistan*. In that letter to President Ayub, Justice Ibrahim wrote "... solidarity depends on the willing consent to live together. In order to do that, it is essential that there should not be mutual suspicion, distrust, fear of domination and wide economic inequality between the East and the West." It can be said that this was the precursor of the Six-Point demand of Awami League in 1966. Failing to persuade the military dictatorship, Justice Ibrahim, an honest, virtuous and upright person, tendered his resignation forthwith, and came back to Dhaka from Rawalpindi. I still remember his comments about the Basic Democracy in 1964. Justice Ibrahim used to tell us, "this evil Democracy cannot last and will vanish from this land within ten years".

How right was Justice Ibrahim! Not only that black system vanished from this land, we got our free and independent Bangladesh within ten years he professed. He was associated with many social and philanthropic organizations. He was the founder-President of the Dhaka University Old Students Association and the Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA). He was the Chief Commissioner of the then East Pakistan Scouts, President of the East Pakistan Red Cross, and helped to establish many socio-cultural organizations. May Almighty Allah give peace to his soul and keep his memory alive for generations to come, so that his upright actions in right moments may inspire other souls of this country.

Mesbah-us-Saleheen is professor of Department of Geography and Environment, Jahangirnagar University.

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.



Healthcare in a shambles

Patients have no choice but to occupy the hospital floor, as there is no empty bed left in DMCH-- one of the major healthcare establishments in the country. The most neglected and ill-maintained field in our country is undoubtedly our healthcare arena and it is getting worse day by day. Would our health sector ever work properly and efficiently?

A whole slew of ministers!

A total of sixty ministers of all shades, ranks and status! Count them. Sixty (more if you include ministerial rank advisors, whips etc.). VIP cars with a fluttering flag mounted on each plying our busy, crowded streets! Wow! Is anybody of any substance or weight left out? The answer is yes! Almost a resounding yes. Oli and Murshed Khan, Delwar and others somehow have been outcasts, much to their chagrin and the respective constituency. An obvious attempt has been made to satisfy a whole clump of politicians. The paradox may be this pointlessness and senseless exercise probably makes a larger cluster of equally or more eligible politicians angry, upset and adversarial.

Will this whole shenanigan serve the interest of the nation?

Wellhardly. Count how many Secretaries (the Ministers are referred to as Secretaries in the US) does the US, the sole superpower and the most powerful nation in the world have. Less than half. The model Khaleda Zia seems to have mimicked is that of the coalition government led by BJP in India, where there is a total of 76 ministers. In India they are compelled to have so many in the Cabinet to ensure the survival of the government. BJP has to keep the smaller parties happy, cozy and content so that they do not turn against the government and unceremoniously topple it. BNP here has no such burden, obligation, compulsion or danger. Singularly the party has garnered nearly 200 seats. So why this desperate, senseless, flagrant and profligate attempt to please so many? Beats me. And most other sober, sensible and fiscally responsible persons.

It will be difficult to distribute portfolios among the hankering lot. It will be terribly costly and a major drain on the troubled government exchequer. Providing office space, facilities, staff will be extravagantly expensive. You also have to think about the entourage and hangers on, influence peddlers and close contacts and newly found friends associated with this big cluster of Ministers. They all collectively form a negative basket, which will almost certainly be against the interest of the people. To exacerbate the problem and to add to the misery, a small army of technocrat ministers, representatives from smaller coalition partners and others have in all probability yet to be inducted in the exalted, swarming and crowded Council of Ministers.

The very first significant step of the new government, I am afraid has been a sloppy, shabby and shady

one. If morning shows the day, this will be a major damper, bummer and downer in the expectation of the electorate. This has been a bad show. Public relations wise, otherwise and all in all.

Omar Khasru, Dhaka

Oh no not again!

I was shocked beyond belief reading your paper this morning. The front and back pages were splashed with reports of BNP hoodlums and godfathers taking control of bus terminals, airport area, wholesale markets, slum areas, repeating the deeds of their predecessors!

Only a few days have gone by and even before the new government has started functioning, the underworld dons and their hoodlums have already secured their stronghold under the very noses of the BNP leadership! The activists

and cadres of the new party in power could not have forgotten the miserable defeat of the Awami League on October 1 election so quickly and for what reasons they lost the polls?

This is an urgent and desperate request from a voter to Begum Khaleda Zia and her senior party leaders. Please address the terrorism and take stern action against the criminal irrespective of his party affiliation. Nip terrorism in the bud before it gets out of control. By doing so the BNP chief may lose a few thousand workers or maybe a few seats in the parliament but she will definitely gain admiration of a grateful nation, that itself is worth more than a million seats in the Jatyas Sangsad.

Farhan Qudus
Old DOHS, Dhaka

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

