

## Awami League should join the parliament

*It's an opportunity, a responsibility and a national obligation*

**A**WAMI League has decided to stay away from Nov 12 by-elections. It is also meeting today to decide whether to join the parliament or not. If it decides not to, AL may have no stake for the time being in the immediate governance process of Bangladesh. More importantly, it will amount to a denial of parliamentary representation to all those people who voted for it. This will effectively "disenfranchise" more than 40 per cent of the people who voted for the AL in the polls 2001.

By not contesting the by-elections, AL will also be losing four of their own seats. One fails to see how this will benefit the party. Since it won in these seats despite the combined BNP-Jamaat votes, its chances of victory were excellent. So, it is giving those seats to other parties.

It has to be queried if the voters gave AL the right to stay away from the House and in the process mute the voter's voice. Having emerged as the single largest party in terms of popular votes polled the AL's representational nature is a fully established fact. It will not sit as a party of MPs belonging to certain constituencies but as the party of nearly half the electorate siding with it. Not going to the parliament will mean that the party doubts the intrinsic confidence that people have reposed in it. Their refusal to enter parliament will prevent the voters' presence in the legislature.

We assert once again that the number of seats won in no way reflects the intrinsic strength or position of the party. Moreover, the AL with its 62 MPs can be the most effective Opposition possible. Public opinion being what it is, the Treasury Bench will definitely have to provide more space to the Opposition or face public criticism. That's why this parliament could be the best forum for the Opposition to act as the shadow government. AL should seize that opportunity.

By joining the parliament Awami League can strengthen the process of governance and the parliamentary system. It can stabilize Bangladesh's socio-economic environment when it needs that most in these troubled global times. And it can be a very effective Opposition in the parliament and outside if it chooses to.

By refusing to join, it will close all political doors except that which leads to agitation. Finally, it will force confrontational politics when no one wants it and create a precedent of rejecting election results that will turn the political process backwards almost immediately.

Awami League will have to decide whether it cares more for short-term vainglorious ego-play or the long term needs of the people where her durable interest actually lie. The choice will be extremely significant in terms of impact it could have on the party's future. We expect the AL to stand as tall as it really is, and do what will serve Bangladesh and all its people best -- join parliament from day one and make their presence felt.

## Milon's misery

*Our mission in Seoul owes explanation*

**I**T is indeed a shame crying out loud that a migrant Bangladeshi worker, struck down with paralysis induced by coronary thrombosis, had to languish at a South Korean hospital for more than six months. The Bangladesh mission in Seoul reportedly refused to offer him any support or protection even though he was in dire straits. It is pathetic even to think that when a local NGO was raising fund for Milon's passage back home through persistent media campaign, our embassy officials were sifting through their bureaucratic handbook to figure out whether an 'undocumented' worker was entitled to its protection. That's not the end of the shameful episode. When we had our own national airliner in Bangladesh Biman, it was Korean Air that flew Milon back home free of cost. Milon's story poignantly portrayed the tale of Korean generosity on the one hand, and inefficiency and insensitivity of our government machinery on the other.

Such apathy shown by government and its missions abroad to the country's overseas workers is simply unacceptable. These are the people who stay thousands of miles away from their near and dear ones to inject more than ten thousand crore taka into the country's economy every year. This economic reality should be enough for them to earn at least the minimum support from our missions abroad. Unfortunately, more often than not, they do not get that support. The embassy people come up with one pretext or the other to deny them assistance. This should cease now.

Here lies the crucial question - whose fault is it that thousands of Bangladeshis work in different countries across the world without any legal status? Is it not the successive governments that, despite repeated reminders from the media, had failed to do anything about unscrupulous recruitment agencies, which sent gullible youth overseas with forged documents and on fake promises? It is not government's responsibility to make sure that when a citizen leaves this country on employment abroad he or she has the valid documents. How could the mission in Seoul refuse Milon any support on the ground that he was an "undocumented" worker when his conditions drew an ample measure of sympathy from the Koreans.

# America's no-win war in Afghanistan



M ABDUL HAFIZ

**E**VEN as the Americans, now faced with the onslaught of bio-terrorism, were still recovering from the trauma of last month's catastrophe, the Bush administration unleashed, in a fury and show of arrogance, a terror of unprecedented dimension on one of the world's most impoverished country, Afghanistan for the latter's suspected terrorists' link. So much injured was the American pride after the Black September tragedy that its administration, equipped with the widest mandate from the US congress to conduct war since second world war, chose to ensure an overkill of its target with the best of the world's lethal weaponry that were soon assembled in north Arabian Sea. For last two weeks the world is watching with a measured trepidation the raining of that lethality over a country already devastated by over two decades of war, scorched as a result of three consecutive years of drought and totally denuded of its meagre resources even for mere survival.

No one knows exactly if the Anglo-American marksmanship of high altitude bombing has been able to hit either their VIP targets or Al-Qaeda camps but there are evi-

dences of huge collateral damage. The Taliban claim that there were at least 400 civilian deaths from the bombing and cruise missile attacks which did not spare even the Red Cross warehouse, the UN installation or the refugee camps. However, at continuing Taliban incaltrance the US seems to have gone berserk and it has stepped up its aerial attacks, totally disregarding the world wide voice of protests against the senseless killing of children,

dent Bush sufficiently hinted about their launching for a ground operation, by all probability, spearheaded by the 'friends' of Northern Alliance. Yet, given the fuzziness of the new kind of war objectives in a guerrilla war terrain where no outsider ever won a war the outcome of the ground war can be dangerously uncertain. Which is why the allies are also exploring other means. They are fondly hoping that with Pakistan, the only Taliban backer

openly annoyed at this stage, India, her arch rival will be just too happy in welcoming Northern Alliance to power. The subtle efforts are learnt to be already under way to strike a balance between the opposite strands. The heady combination of war and diplomacy is paving the way for a future political dispensation acceptable to all. While mercilessly pounding Afghanistan, the Americans are also dropping foods as a taken of goodwill for Afghans of

however tenuous that may be. Tony Blair's visit was quickly followed by US Secretary of State Colin Powell when differences surfaced on the question of the role of Northern Alliance as well as Kashmir. Powell's mission has been to patch up the difference as much as possible so that it does not impair the US' immediate objective in Afghanistan i. e. the collapse of Taliban regime. It was in Powell's presence in Islamabad when the most serious

to the full satisfaction of its external operator. When after many centuries of trial and error a central authority was established by a Durrani Pushtun King Ahmad Shah Abdali who had founded the Kingdom of Afghanistan in 1747 its history has been far from smooth. Following the overthrow of the last Durrani King Zahir Shah in 1973, there was an erosion of a central authority in the country which could not be restored in last three decades of continuous upheavals in Afghanistan. Given a free hand Afghans alone can do it. External hobnobbing in its domestic sphere will only worsen the situation.

As far as its terrorist links are concerned, Afghanistan has already moved beyond a point where it is an inseparable part of Pan-Islamist-militancy whether that can be called terrorism or not. The more the bombing of the country with more civilian killing, the more outside sympathy it will garner from Arab-Islamic world where the common men are not convinced that the war against Afghanistan or any other Muslim country is not directed against Islam.

The ruling elites in those countries might have been panicked by the Bush doctrine, the newly proclaimed gospel of US imperialism "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists", but the public seem undaunted, clinging to a middle ground. When the seething anger of the millions of them will explode someday, that will be a bad day indeed for the humanity. International community has a responsibility to work to pre-empt the advent of that day.

BRIG (Retd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS

## PERSPECTIVES

The ruling elites in Muslim countries might have been panicked by the Bush doctrine "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists", but the public seem undaunted, clinging to a middle ground. When the seething anger of the millions of them will explode some day, that will be a bad day indeed for the humanity. International community has a responsibility to work to pre-empt the advent of that day.

women, old and invalids. If the terrorists attack on America was an act of in sanity and cruelty, the people around the world wonder what then the Anglo-American actions in Afghanistan are!

Even if the world opinion can be disregarded that doesn't solve the Americans' problem. Because they have to catch bin Laden, dead or alive, to bring him to justice and stamp out the roots of terrorism. But no amount of carpet-bombing will lead them to Laden's lair. For the purpose, the necessary ground troops and personnel of the US Marines' special operation group as well as British Special Air Services (SAS) are kept handy and their operation has already begun although it is not clear as yet if Pakistan also has provided an operational base for them. Presi-

now on their side and the Northern Alliance eager to fight against the Taliban the collapse of Taliban regime is imminent. The future government of Afghanistan which will, of course, be engineered by the allies would do the dirty job of rounding up bin Laden on the allies' behalf.

However in a fast unfolding scenario it is painfully realised by the US that any attempt to bring back a minority and defeated force to power in an ethnic melting pot like Afghanistan will only open up a Pandora's box and may as well boomerang in the long run. Pakistan, the US' crucial ally at this juncture is stridently opposed to their return to Kabul where it always wanted a friendly government. While Pakistan which is already walking the razor's edge cannot be

wavering loyalties. At a higher plane the trick is to buy off as many Taliban commanders as possible. The Americans think that some soft gestures amidst the hellfire of war will result in large scale defection in Taliban ranks to hasten the fall of their regime. They want to assault the rampart of faith from which the Taliban fight by bribing the latter heavily. It is a different question whether and how much a future dispensation based on 'quislings', turn-coats and opportunists will work to provide desired stability in Afghanistan both internally and externally.

However, to this end a flurry of diplomacy is already afoot in this region. In a rare gesture Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, visited both India and Pakistan to craft an understanding between the two

battle along the Line of Control in Kashmir in last ten months broke out. To India's dismay, Colin Powell pointed to the centrality of Kashmir in Indo-Pakistan dispute but responded to her sensitivity by visiting Delhi where he must have tried to allay Indian misgivings over US role in Kashmir by meeting both the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his External Affairs minister, Jaswant Singh.

Notwithstanding these patchworks and enormous diplomatic resources of the West, the cycle of violence initiated by the US in Afghanistan will continue indefinitely bringing in its sweep the entire region. Each society, country and the region has its own peculiar dynamics and an imposed solution on any one of them can never work

# Counter-terrorism: War as a communal weapon

PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

**T**HE government could not have hurt democracy and insulted the public more grievously than it did by reappointing Mr George Fernandes as Defence Minister. It has compounded the offence by swearing in Mr Harin Pathak, charged with murder, as Mr Fernandes' junior.

Mr Fernandes quit the Cabinet after Tehelka convincingly exposed serious corruption in arms deals. It also showed his official residence was used to negotiate sleazy contracts.

The original reasons for Mr Fernandes' resignation remain valid. The Venkataswami commission has upheld the authenticity of Tehelka's videotapes.

In democracies, ministers are not meant to wait till their wrong-doing is legally established. The criterion of innocent-until-proven-guilty applies to criminals. Politicians must accept constructive responsibility for wrong-doing in their ministries.

Thus, railway ministers must resign following a serious mishap not because they personally tamper with fishplates, but because they fail to manage the railways safely with sound procedures. Mature democracies respect constructive responsibility.

A good example is Peter Mandelson's resignation from the Blair cabinet for his indirect role in helping the Hinduja brothers. In India too, C.D. Deshmukh and T.T. Krishnamachary resigned from the Nehru cabinet, accepting responsibility. More recently, Madhavrao Scindia resigned for similar, commendable, reasons.

Constructive responsibility is not some unattainable noble standard, but a basic democratic convention. Such conventions demarcate democracies from banana republics and dictatorships.

The Vajpayee government has contempt for such conventions. It has reduced democracy to a cynical calculus of numbers. Mr Pathak can now strut about giving orders to generals although there is a well-supported case against him of murdering a policeman in uniform during a communal riot.

The parivar's equation of Islam and terrorism is insane. A dozen punitive attacks on "terrorist" camps won't wipe out Kashmir's militancy, whose sources are largely domestic. There is no military shortcut to addressing Kashmiri aspirations for democracy, autonomy, justice and peace... India and Pakistan can't have a conventional conflict without risking a nuclear conflagration. Kashmir may be a bilateral issue. But nuclear dangers concern the whole world.

This is wholesale re-writing of the ground-rules of democracy. In principle, this is indistinguishable from the way Indira Gandhi amended the election law after a High Court held her guilty of electoral malpracticeto exempt herself from the law's scope.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee is personally responsible for this new assault on democratic sensibilities. It is he who re-inducted Mr Fernandes, claiming there is "no case" despite Section 8-B of the Commissions of Inquiry Act.

Mr Vajpayee brought back Mr Fernandes for three reasons. He was making a nuisance of himself, something the NDA can't afford with elections due in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

Secondly, RSS hardliners became increasingly uncomfortable with Mr Jaswant Singh's holding of the Defence portfolio when war broke out in Afghanistan. They think Mr Singh is too soft on the US. The RSS lobbied heavily for Mr Fernandes, exploiting its re-established proximity to Mr Vajpayee.

This again belies the claim that Mr Vajpayee is a "liberal". The third reason is worse: the BJP plans to up the ante and embark on a military misadventure in Kashmir through Mr Fernandes. Beating war drums could be its sole chance of not losing heavily in UP.

There is pressing evidence for this. The army's "punitive" raids of October 14-15 were timed to coincide with Mr Colin Powell's visit. They were this misadventure's first instalment.

Evidently, the government, frustrated at the attention Pakistan is receiving as America's "frontline" ally, wants to use today's anti-"terrorist" climate to attack the Kashmiri militants through "hot pursuit" and "pro-active" manoeuvres in the Valley.

According to officials, the government reckons it could pull this off without inviting serious reprimand from the US. Right now, the US, it believes, is far too preoccupied with bin Laden to want to restrain New Delhi unless Indian troops cross the LoC.

This might be the BJP-RSS's best chance to stir things up in Kashmir and score points against Pakistan.

A "proactive" stance could at least give the BJP an opportunity to politicise the "war against terrorism", whip up bellicose Hindu-nationalist sentiment, and win the make-or-break UP election. According to the latest Lokmat poll, the party stands to win just 102 seats (of a total of 403).

This diabolical military plan is in keeping with the sangh parivar's handling of terrorism. That approach depicts Islam as a militant, war-like, pro-terrorist religion. Thus, sarsanghachalak Sudarshan says that all Muslims may not be terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims. He is thoroughly wrong.

The sangh approach separates terrorism's context from what's happening in Palestine, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and many Muslim-majority countries. Here, US policy is a critical factor in the repression and dispossession of people who happen to be Muslim.

It is because Israel and Saudi Arabia are America's strongest Middle Eastern allies, and because the US has rained destruction on Iraq, that tendencies like Al-Qaeda find fringe support.

Many people can't make you-are-with-us-or-against-us choices about this war. Lakhs have marched against it in "Catholic" Italy, "Protestant" America, "Hindu" India and "Buddhist" Korea.

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won't wipe out Kashmir's militancy, whose sources are largely domestic. There is no military shortcut to addressing Kashmiri aspirations for democracy, autonomy, justice and peace.

India and Pakistan can't have a conventional conflict without risking a nuclear conflagration. Starting such a conflict through "pro-active"

operations spells trouble. Kashmir may be a bilateral issue. But nuclear dangers are not. They concern the whole world.

Finally, the people of India, in particular UP, are not so senseless as to be taken in by the BJP's military play. The Afghanistan war is far from popular. It has already caused 300 civilian non-combatants'

deaths. The war could soon degenerate into butchery. That would be extremely unpopular in India.

Demagogues like Mr Fernandes don't sound convincing when they paint China/Pakistan or "cross-border terrorism" as the greatest danger to Indian security and unity, when the real danger is internal. The VHP's October 17 storming of the Ayodhya "temple" shows that.

Mr Vajpayee has to his shame called the episode a "security lapse". As in Kashmir, so in Ayodhya and with the Lucknow Vidhan Sabha on their minds Vajpayee & Co are playing with fire.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

## 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.



PHOTO: SAIDUR RAHMAN SHAPAN, A FREELANCER

## A procession of colours

A row of boats dots the horizon in a procession of colours. The patched but many hued sails of the boats gust ahead with the wind and the arms of the boatmen keep pace with the splendour and speed of the waves churning the monsoon river. But such lovely sights are becoming rare as machines replace the muscle and the wind.

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

### Bravo PM

The Prime Minister's speech on 19 October was indeed a well-written one and her stern attitude is worth appreciating. At a time, when the world's economy, not to say only Bangladesh's, has been struck miserably by the Twin Tower tragedy, we look up to her with lot of hopes and aspirations.

We do appreciate her uncompromising vow to punish any kind of defaulter, be it in her own party. Of course only time will tell whether she means it.

She should emphasise on eradicating irregularities in her own party. Common people have always been the victim of the wrath of the powerful including the PM. Therefore, this time Khaleeda Zia should be cautious. It would be a very gargantuan task to identify the chameleons and sycophants but it must be done because they are the ones who ruin the image of the ruling party. The PM has rightly pointed out not to expect too much from the new government which has taken control of a totally

battered economy but the common people's minimum expectation at this moment is fairness and justice towards all, which would help restore our faith and confidence.

Anjali Akbar  
Jazipur Road, Dhaka

### Wrong information

In the "Life sketch of Prof. Badruddoza" (October 17) it was stated that "Prof Choudhury had his education in... Dhaka Medical College..." But Prof Choudhury was never in fact a student of Dhaka Medical College but obtained his MBBS degree from Sir Salimullah Medical College and Hospital.

Shouldn't the people responsible for handling these matters delve deeper in to the folds of the subject before unravelling it to the public?

A Concerned Citizen,  
on e-mail

### "Not excuse but action"

Your editorial "Not Excuse but action" (October 16) was indeed a

good piece of writing for the serious readers. It focuses on our moral duty to protect the rights of the minority communities.

Wouldn't the correct expression be, "No excuse but action".

Abul Ashraf Noor  
Uttara, Dhaka

### People's expectations

BNP-led alliance has won 214 seats in the October 1 election and formed government with the biggest ever council of ministers. Can a poor country like Bangladesh afford to run a government with 60 ministers when our neighbouring country India has squeezed its portfolio of Ministry to reduce government expenditure?

Will the new government impose higher tax and other utility charges like gas, electricity etc to defray huge expenditure incurred by these ministers?

We would urge the new government to do the following alongside fulfilling its pre-election pledges:

1. BNP must justify its stance

about induction of 60 ministers to remove people's confusion.

2. The president has summoned the first session of the 8th parliament. The new government should elect neutral non-political personality as the Speaker and the President who would be acceptable to all during the parliament session.

3. The AL has rejected the election results alleging it as "crude rigging" and has decided not to join the parliament. The new PM should take personal initiative and bring AL in the parliament.

4. The government should take necessary measures to ban student politics for the sake of uninterrupted education system in consultation with the other political parties.

Mustafizur Rahman  
Purana Paltan Lane, Dhaka

### BNP's 2nd innings report

According to the latest information, BNP lost two quick wickets in their 2nd innings even before a ball was bowled. It happened when they

selected a couple of "traitors/collaborators" as cabinet members and allowed followers who are spreading communal hatred.

We are extremely disheartened and demand a full review of the composition of the team and stern punishments for those who support religious persecution.

It is too early in the innings to lose faith but it would be a grave mistake if BNP does not take them out and sidelined them for once for and all.

The BNP should remember that Duckworth-Lewis method won't be there to decide the winner if it rains; it is the people, who hold the ultimate power in deciding the winner.

N. Karim, on e-mail

### Recognise Bangabandhu

In response to Mr Shahadat Khanam's letter (October 17), I feel that I should clarify my earlier stance.

Firstly, I appreciate Mrs

Yasmeen Murshed's response to Mr Mahfuz Anam. Everyone has a right to an opinion but I don't agree with the grounds on which Mrs Murshed attacked Mr Anam.

I feel that too much time and money has been spent in the past in naming and renaming. I feel that this type of politics should stop. No one is asking for a new declaration. The last government has already declared Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation.

I agree with Mr Khan that Sheikh Hasina and her government went well overboard with their obsession with Bangabandhu. Passing bills, which made it illegal to criticise Bangabandhu were outrageous and in my opinion, unconstitutional.

Mr Khan has claimed that "most people who opposed the creation of Bangladesh are now in their graves." Let me point out to him that two of them are in our present Cabinet!

Shameran Abed,  
on e-mail

### US and terrorism

In her letter, "US air raids" (October 18), Saima Khan said, "Didn't one of their own people, Timothy McVeigh bomb the World Trade Centre in 1993? Then can the US claim that they have no internal terrorism?"

First of all, the terrorists who masterminded and carried out the 1993 bombing at New York's World Trade Centre are Ramzi Yousef, Yousef Ismoil, Eyad Ismoil and Adul Rahman Yasin. All of them were convicted for their crime.

Secondly, United States never claimed that they don't have any internal terrorists and terrorist groups. Timothy McVeigh (a terrorist) was convicted and sentenced to death for Oklahoma City bombing.

The only reason, the US is bombing Afghanistan is because Osama Bin-Laden's puppet government refused to hand him over, under overwhelming evidence of his involvement in world-wide terrorism.

Humanity is always against war and we all want the US to stop bombing innocent Afghan people. But we

should not lose perspective. That only makes us look ridiculous in front of the rest of the world.

Mahmud Zaman  
California, USA, on e-mail

### Freedom fighters' welfare

The statement of the leaders of Central Coordination Council of Bangladesh MuktiJodha (October 8) caught my attention. They urged upon the new government not to give emphasis on the welfare of freedom fighters who constitute a small portion of population. The freedom fighters are the pride of the nation. The nation remembers the shahid with much respect. But what have we done for the living heroes? Freedom fighters are no doubt a small portion of population but in view of connotation they are above the general citizen. Everyone of this country are citizens but all citizens are not freedom fighters.

Nur  
Texas, USA, on e-mail