

DHAKA SUNDAY NOVEMBER 4, 2001

Subway system for Dhaka Experts should have the final say

RIME Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has told the Russian Ambassador in a formal meeting that she is interested to build an underground transportation system in Dhaka with Russian support. The PM is keen to reduce the extreme traffic congestion in Dhaka and wants an alternative transportation route. The Russians have a track record in building underground systems and the Kolkata subway is a sterling example of that, hence they being approached. The will behind the intentions are fine but one feels that before a decision is taken as which system underground or overground suits us is taken the national experts should have the right to scrutinize and decide for the people. We welcome the political decision to go for an alternative system but seek greater consensus of expert opinion on the type of the system/route.

In fact, similar proposals were under consideration by the Awami League government as well but no final decision was taken. Such a major infrastructure project, which will have a profound impact on the life of the city, its economy and the national economy itself, can't be a decision based on political goodwill only. It needs the careful minds of the experts to decide which will be the best for all of us.

That means an independent group of experts with full powers should be brought together reflecting competence in all the relevant areas to figure out whether it makes more sense to go underground or move up. Should it be sub-ways or skyways? A host of factors need to taken into account before such a decision is taken. And only experts can do that.

Khaleda Zia should not commit herself to this project before the technical part is completed without any predisposition. The Russian ambassador has said that Begum Zia had in fact discussed this project along with Russian support for the same during her tenure as the Leader of the Opposition. While this is laudable that her concern for the crippling traffic jams has taken such a priority, one hopes that concern has not become a premature commitment without proper technical support.

The Russian envoy has also said that he will process a formal proposal for the project, which also means that there is a great deal of urgency, involved but again we would like to raise a flag of warning. The national experts must consider all the options before feasibility studies are commissioned. Otherwise this will become a lost opportunity and precedence for less than appropriate methods of governance.

Such projects are so huge and long lasting in nature. We urge that a technical experts committee be formed immediately and a political process to support the same body be also put into motion to ensure consensus of all before a final decision is considered.

Jail killing

Remains a test-case for rule of law

hat a new political regime is in power doesn't necessarily mean we can be tentative about the jail killing incident which added a tainted chapter to our national history on November 3, 1975. More so, when the change in the political order has been the product of elections held in a democracy. And that democracy by virtue of its sustenance through a process of elections and its pluralistic character can not be surgical in its treatment of history. It has the resilience to face up to facts, call the spade a spade and come out stronger in the process. Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Mansur Ali and AHM Kamruzzaman are figures of our history. And it is an immutable fact of history that a most heinous crime was committed to snuff them out of their worldly existence with a design to obliterate a seminal part of our political heritage in order that some power hungry people could feel secure in their diabolically acquired positions. If the first BNP government had failed to go into the jail killing incident, the former AL government during its five-year tenure could only initiate a trial of the accused kill-

The Neutral Caretaker Government: An assessment

SHAH AMS KIBRIA

There must be lessons to be learnt

from such an exercise. Elections

generate a lot of emotion and

perhaps one needs some time to

calmly look back at the event for

However, the performance of the

caretaker government is in a some-

what different category. Its work

can be better evaluated while our

memories about its activities are

still fresh. In fact, the sooner the

this nation's destiny for almost

three months. We must take a hard

look at the performance of the

individuals who were entrusted by

the nation to ensure that the elec

tions are held in a free and fair

environment. The Constitution

Above all, have they been neutral?

a matter of great regret that Mr.

Latifur Rahman belied our expec-

tations. He not only turned a deaf

ear to all our pleas for a bit of fair-

ness and justice, he was downright

hostile to us. He had neither an

the analysis to be fully objective.

explanation nor a word of regret that the telephone lines to the XPERTS will no doubt outgoing prime minister's resisubject the results of the dence were rudely disconnected as general election held on soon as power was transferred. October 1 to searching analysis and Was it a discredited government

they will explain the underlying from which he took power? No and reasons for the success and failure he knew it verv well. of the different political parties. He and his colleagues have set a

record of insensitivity to protests and complaints from the Awami League. Not surprisingly perhaps Mr. Rahman was most eager to comply with Begum Zia's requests. When she asked for immediate military deployment, he rushed to Bangabhaban to plead for immediate military deployment. Many people were surprised by the unseemly haste but he was not deterred.

post-mortem is done, the better. It Sheikh Hasina took some pride in is most likely that the nation's introducing the "neutral careattention will shift from the caretaker" concept to ensure free and taker government to the newly fair election in a country where elected government and its election-rigging by ruling parties programmes and policies. Perhaps was a common practice. Awami this has already happened to a League activists fought hard and great extent. In fact, no one likes to made great sacrifices to establish talk about Mr. Latifur Rahman or the system. BNP was opposed to his advisers. Some people are the system but it had to yield under embarrassed by the performance the pressure of public opinion. It of the group, which presided over

is not neutral and impartial or if he does not happen to be a man of integrity, one can only curse one's luck because no one can bring them to book

The caretakers can just ignore public opinion, claiming that they do not have to pay heed to what anyone said. In fact, Mr. Rahman and some of his colleagues precisely did that. He did not feel the need even to explain to the nation why he was taking certain highly controversial steps. Perhaps he knew that his little secret will be out some day and that is why he felt the need to guarantee himself special security arrangements after handing over power. Why was this man so frightened?

Power vested in him by the constitution was taken by him to be license to act according to his sweet will. He behaved as if this was a constitutionally authorised autocracy for three months! Let me give the reasons for making these allegations

1. The Chief Adviser issued orders for the transfer and re-assignment of 13 secretaries to ministries within minutes of taking the oath

government and shall carry on the routine functions of such government with the aid and assistance of persons in the services of the Republic. Obviously the Chief Adviser had his own private source of "aid and assistance"

2. More than a thousand officers were transferred within a matter of a few weeks. These were not random transfers because the aim of this exercise was to remove pro-Awami League officers from positions of power and influence and assign pro-BNP officers in their place. How could the caretaker government identify such a vast number of officers as pro-AL or pro-BNP? Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Police Supers, TNO sand even OCs were transferred by the hundred. Clearly, it was impossible for them to carry out such a massive exercise on their own.

How is it that the neutral government of Mr. Rahman could spot so many officers who had pro-BNP sympathies? No, it was not a matter of mere chance. A very carefully prepared list supplied by the BNP and Jamaat, could have been the

accorded a kid glove treatment. For example, curfew was imposed on Feni to search the house of an Awami League MP Mr Joinal Hazari but no such step was taken to search the house of VP Joinal, a BNP leader with an unsavoury reputation. Instead he was given a day's notice before his house was

searched. When questioned on this point, the Chief Adviser could only make vague and mysterious references to some sort of defiance of the government as the reason for such discriminatory treatment for Mr Hazari. Repression of the Awami League leaders and activists became the order of the day under the caretaker government. 5. An attempt was made to change the electoral laws. Some of the laws

harassment, the BNP leaders were

were actually changed though some others had to be abandoned in the face of strong opposition. Of course in this matter it was the CEC who seemed to have played a more direct role but there was a strong impression in the country that the CA and the CEC were working in close cooperation with each other. I have never got a satisfactory

explanation from the CEC for not

taking these proposed reforms to

the parliament for consideration.

Electoral laws of a country are

matters of national concern. As far

as possible one should aim at

national consensus before making

any major change in these laws.

Surprisingly, the Election Commis-

dissolved. Thus we had an extraor-

dinary situation in which the basis

electoral laws were changed with-

approved. Who were these people

who wanted to thrust their ideas on

the nation? It would be unthink-

without parliamentary approval.

Take, for instance, the question of

the poll observers. The AL repeat-

edly and persistently questioned

the wisdom of introducing these

because no one can be certain

talked about tough conditions for

observers but in the end it was

evident that this was a mere show.

When the time came, the Election

Commission issued literally lakhs

of identity cards authorising the

cardholders to enter the polling

booths. No one even bothered to remind the CEC about those tough conditions 6. The armed forces were misled to

work against AL leaders and activists. It was indeed very surprising that lists were prepared in every district in fact in every constituency, of centres which were supposed to be vulnerable and hence the army was to be deployed there. These so-called vulnerable centres were those in which the AL had strong voter support. The coincidence was uncanny! Elements of the army or the BDR were sent there to "deal with" the potential terrorists. They targeted Awami League leaders and activists because, according to the lists, those were the alleged terrorists who posed threat to law and order. Where were these lists prepared? Was it the office of the Chief Adviser or the BNP? Only the BNP could have prepared such lists. The frequent and unscheduled meetings between the Chief Adviser and BNP's election coordinator was no secret. One is forced to conclude therefore that it was the caretaker government that deliberately misled the armed forces to work in a certain way to help the 4-party alliance. There is no other reasonable explanation for the unexpected behaviour by the army personnel witnessed by our candidates across the country.

7. The CA refused to declare that he would not accept the post of president if it were offered to him. When questioned, he gave an evasive reply. Later, under pressure, he had a statement issued by a spokesman but the impression left in public mind did not inspire confidence about his intentions.

8. The final point I want to make is sion proposed these big changes in about the choice of advisers by Mr Rahman. Unlike the earlier advislaw only after the parliament was ers in 1991 and 1996, the individuals chosen in 2001 did not have, with perhaps a few exceptions, out parliamentary approval. One national stature. Retired secretarunelected body proposed and ies who had served under the outgoing government should not another unelected group have been brought in. No one expected relatives of the CA to jump into the high pedestal of the able in any democratic country to advisory council. There is no dearth of individuals with high change the basic electoral laws national standing who did not belong to any political party. Yet relatively undistinguished or even unknown persons were chosen. All the members worked only for one goal: how to ensure the electoral observers into the polling booths defeat of the AL. It was a case of treachery and betraval not only of about their neutrality. The CEC the Awami League but also of the whole nation. ensuring the neutrality of such

The author was AL Election Coordinator during the last election and finance minister during Sheikh Hasina's government. He has been elected MP from Habigang in October 2001 election.

There is no dearth of individuals with high national standing who did not belong to any political party. Yet relatively undistinguished or even unknown persons were chosen. All the members worked only for one goal: how to ensure the

OPINION

electoral defeat of the AL.

explicitly mandated them to perwas a unique and innovative sysform this task. Have they fulfilled tem that had the potential to their mandate? Have they been become a model for others to faithful to the oath they took? follow. Unfortunately, our experience this year has made us doubt-In my view, the answer to all these ful about the wisdom of the system. questions are in the negative. A group of persons are entrusted, Neutrality was cast aside in such a almost entirely on good faith, with cavalier fashion that a chorus of the responsibility of running the public criticism rose soon after the government at a critical time of Chief Adviser took his oath of transition from one elected govoffice. Unlike his predecessor, an ernment to the next. The system upright man of impeccable integseemed to work well in 1996. Howrity, Mr. Latifur Rahman tarnished ever, can anyone guarantee that a his image almost from the very system dependent on the good beginning of his term. He deviated judgement, neutrality and honesty from the basic goal of neutrality of an individual or a group of indifrom day one indeed, from the viduals without any other safemoment he was sworn in. He guards will work simply on the seemed to have been driven by an basis of good faith? What happens unseen hand to reach a goal. His if the group is neither neutral nor mind was set even before he took honest? What remedy do we have his oath of office. He came preagainst such a contingency? Events pared to pave the way for the elechave proved that there is hardly toral victory of the 4-party alliance. any way out of such a trap. It is a We came to this conclusion within gamble and if one loses there is not the first week after the 15th of July. much that one can do about it. We kept on hoping against hope When the system was introduced, that perhaps he would step back no one paid much attention to the from the partisan position and be question of accountability. Most of faithful to his commitment as the head of a neutral government. It is

us assumed that former chief justices would be persons of high integrity. It has become clear to us all that this was too naï ve an assumption that actually the caretaker government has no accountability to anyone. If the CA

of his office. Article 58C says that 'the non-Party Caretaker Government shall consist of the Chief Adviser at its head and not more than ten other advisers, all of whom shall be appointed by the President.' Clearly, the caretaker government was not fully formed until the appointment of the ten advisers but the Chief Adviser could not wait. His mind was made up. He did not care for the legality or otherwise of his orders. He refused to change his decision even when it was pointed out that the appointment of the principal secretary was not only against long standing convention but also illegal. He had to have this man as his principal secretary despite the latter's BNP connections. The basic requirement of neutrality which was the *raison d'être* of his government was trampled under foot. He has been consulting different people and making his plans. Who were these persons? Were they neutral? Were they civil servants? Mr. Rahman does not seem to recognise the moral implications of such secret consultations. It was indeed strange for a former judge to seek private advice from unknown sources. Article 58D clearly says that "the non-Party Caretaker Government shall discharge its functions as an interim only possible basis of the mass transfers. We noted with surprise that Mr. Rahman and his chosen advisers did not find anything wrong in transferring officials on the basis of a list prepared by the BNP. That, it seems in retrospect, was their brief.

3. Key officials in the CA's office, Information Ministry including Radio, TV, BSS and Election Commission were carefully replaced. Is it possible to believe that these postings were not done with a view o influencing the elections? The BSS chief was replaced.

But was it necessary to bring in his place someone who was well known as a collaborator with the Pakistani forces? The thrust of the caretaker government's action was not lost to the other officials. Lastminute postings in the EC aroused wide spread suspicion. Repeated protests by the Awami League failed to move the Chief Adviser to change these carefully calculated postings.

4. Partisan approach to the arms recovery campaign was too obvious to escape notice. There was much support in the country for a vigorous campaign to recover arms from known terrorists. But the nation saw with astonishment that while Awami League leaders were subjected to harsh measures, even

ers. The new BNP government being expressly committed to the rule of law would, hopefully, bring the trial to its logical conclusion.

All the four leaders, especially Tajuddin Ahmed as wartime prime minister and Syed Nazrul Islam as the acting president, contributed signally to the political and diplomatic recognition of Bangladesh's cause during those fateful days of 1971. While paying tributes to the effective role they played in facilitating the emergence of Bangladesh, we must realise that the recognition of their due place in history has gone by default for far too long for our conscience to bear up with. Poignantly because they were finished off most brutally. No matter on which side of the political divide one may be sitting, there's simply no belittling of Tajuddin Ahmed and Syed Nazrul Islam for the effectual role they played during the liberation war and its immediate aftermath.

After three consecutive national elections, the time has come for some political maturity to be shown by a fully nonpartisan view taken of history. All our national heroes must be given their due place in history secured through vicissitudes of political life.

OMAR KHASRU

AVID Letterman, celebrated and hilarious US whelmed us. The political colcomic genius, has a late night talk show on CBS television exercise before and after the elecnetwork. Famous for his iconoclasand strenuous, acerbic and argutic, irreverent and impish sense of mentative with not a shred of humor, a trademark for his fivenights-a-week show is a whimsical. Come to think of it, there is preabsurd and extremely funny Top Ten List of reasons, rationale or and puny little satire in our newsequivocation for a current and paper opinion pieces. pressing event or occurrence. We have all heard and read the

To bridge this cavernous gap and to lighten things up, and purely various reasons and explanations for innocuous fun, antic and puckfor the recent election debacle of ish frolic, here is a modest attempt Awami League. The pundits, colat identifying dozen top reasons, in umnists, editors, experts and seers with Cassandra complex have the spirit of David Letterman, for Awami election fiasco. Since we spared no effort and left no stone Bangalees are verbose and expanunturned to give us their opinion, sive, I am passing twelve rationales perception, precepts, analysis and in the name of ten. That just fits the deductions. Prior to the elections,

their incessant pontification, tone of this piece to a tee. So here prognostication and goes proselytization deluged and over-

Top ten reasons for AL election debacle

1. With a dozen not so top foreign Ph.D., Sheikh Hasina was too umns, discourse, and the whole scholarly., high-brow and incomprehensible to commoners; the tion has been very solemn, serious masses wanted a less, far less, educated PM;

2. People wanted to give Mahfuz humor associated with any of it. Anam the opportunity to write the customary rambling, modern day cious little humor in our politics Aesop's fable, redundant frontpage piece, imploring Khaleda Zia to accede to father of the nation designation. As if it is the most crucial, seminal and urgent matter. The resultant peace, harmony and rapport would make Mr. Anam a

> peace prize. 3. Give the members, MPs, Ministers of the other party a chance to travel far and near, to

potent rival of Hasina for the Nobel

exotic locations, and get an opportunity at government largesse and officially sponsored and subsidized shopping spree;

4. Hasina was getting too predictable and boring as the queen of the stardust TV evening news, and her gang of Awami supporting cast and flunkies were getting old and tedious with the same old repetitious act; people wanted new lead player, new cast and new unfolding drama with Humayun Ahmed twists.

5. She ran out of glittering new apparel. All 1827 sarees, like the shoes of Imelda Marcos, had each been adorned once during the fiveyear reign; people could not bear to see her wear the same attire twice.

6. Sheikh Hasina and Awami League had run out of places, establishments and structures to

name after her family members party the chance to do the same; and relatives. People were getting 10. 'Awami' sounds too much tired of the same names for multilike an alien and Razakar term. ple structures.

terrorist accomplices; they were

spread the favor and give the rival

EDITOR TO THE

yearning for a new set of villains.

bridge.

People were enamored by terms 7. People, out for stroll and like Nationalist and 4-party alliance, which sounded a lot like relaxation in the parliament area, were missing the floating bridge unified, pro-nationalist and proover Crescent Lake; they were tired liberation entity, thereby overlookof getting across the lake in a round ing and ignoring stealthy presence about way and wanted a new of Jamaat, Shaikul Hadis and Mufti Amini

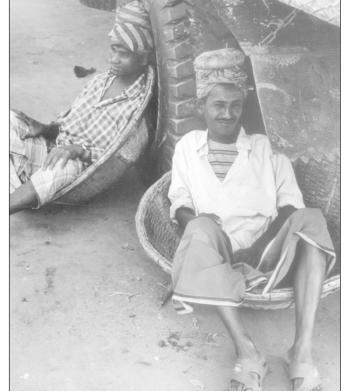
8. People got tired of the same 11. George W. Bush to Sheikh Hasina, "Bin Laden did it!' set of villainous ruling party politicians, ministers, MPs and their 12. Finally, the most hideous depraved sons, student cadres and

covert action and concerted, and cognizant conspiracy by majority of the common voters.

9. Awami Ministers, MPs and Now you know. You can add leaders sent their children abroad our own reason to make it a and bought houses and apartbaker's dozen. This munchkin ments in New York, Florida and effort may only be good for vestigial San Francisco; people want to facetious munching.

PHOTORIAL

pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



Working men at rest

Day labourers rest on their baskets with their heads against the treaded tires of trucks. The contrast is strange because the mechanized vehicles are very costly while the workers who toil with their muscles are paid wages that are barely enough to survive. The basket, the machine and the men are all part of the same work but they are valued differently. Who comes first?

"An American opinion"

I was astonished to learn that America feed the whole world. It indicates the lack of knowledge of the American about the rest of the world. The aid America gives mostly goes to Israel. But how much aid they have given to the Palestinians?

America earns money by selling arms and ammunition. Ťo increase their sale they always instigate war between other countries. Can we claim this to be humanitarian? If you can earn \$100 by selling arms cant you donate \$10 from that for 'eye wash'?

If America behaves like a rational country, if they don't interfere in other country's affair we won't need any help from the American. If the USA don't exploit the rest of the world for their greedy purpose, the world resource would be enough for everyone's need.

Yes, we all are queuing to go to America, because you are after our asset (such as gas of Bangladesh or the consumers' oil of the Middle East) or market.

PHOTO: STAF

You said people of Saudi Arabia and Middle East attacked you. Then why did you attack Afghanistan instead of those countries? You said USA had helped Saudi Arabia and Middle East. Do you know how much the USA has sucked from Saudi Arabia in the name of the Kuwait war? Finally, Who created Osama Bin

Laden and the Taliban? Isn't it the United States of America?

Shawkat Hossain

Lalmatia, Dhaka, on e-mai

Source of Anthrax organism

We would like to know the source of Anthrax organism. Which country is behind this attack and spreading panic throughout the world? As it has been happening just after the September 11 tragedy and during the US attack in Afghanistan, many country suspect the Muslim countries, partic-ularly Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, to be behind this attack!

Bangladesh is likely to have relationship with all countries of the world expect Israel, perhaps over with 100 countries! Our central post offices can detect identity of all countries and so we can identify the country of origin of powder carrying envelope. It is vital to take precautionary measures!

Dr. Lailun Nahar Dhaka

People's verdict

However, shell-shocking it was for the Awami League, it would have been dignified for Sheikh Hasina to

accept the result of the October 1 elections

I am particularly happy about the fact that people did not vote for the likes of Hazi Mokbul, Hazi Selim, Joynal Hazari, Akhtaruzzaman Babu and Shamim Osman. It proves that people have the courage to reject these sort of persons through the ballot, otherwise, against whom they are powerless.

It is true that Sheikh Hasina herself is responsible for the debacle of her party. We often felt ashamed by her choice of words, her arrogant attitude, her support for Joynal Hazari and other terrorists in her party.

In civilised countries, when a party fails to win, the leader resigns to let a competent person lead and take the party forward. But unfortunately our leaders feel they can not go wrong and they are irreplaceable.

It is high time for the Awami League to realise that people are quite capable to decide for themselves. We can call this election a silent revolution of people against a government who thought that the state has become their personal

property. It is also a warning for the next government to act wisely. YΖ

Uttara, Dhaka, on e-mail

ALBMR

It is a good sign to read that AL eadership embarked on a BMR programme (not BMRE) (October 24). Who will carry out the cleansing at the top? Young budding leaders do not like to walk under the shadow of other's umbrella. The top leaders in the political parties like to become permanent fixtures. Give wav once in a while. Have direct elections inside. Practice democracy-- not lip service.

AL may spring back without the present leadership-- of course there will be a split in the first phase due to the inertia effect. Parties should not become family drawing rooms. The challenge of all political leaders is to change the image of politics as a business consortium.

AMA Dhaka Anthrax leakage

Are some US intelligence groups seeking alibi for foreign operation? The huge publicity looks dubious. Askeptic Dhaka

Export package

The central bank on October 24 announced its first stimulus package to bolster the country's dwinfor stock building of such contain-ers in their cold storage. Bank dled export figure. As part of the package, the Bangladesh Bank interest for this sector has been

reduced bank rate to six per cent fixed at 10 per cent per annum. In from the earlier seven per cent to countries such as India, Thailand, Singapore and Pakistan, interest encourage commercial banks to reduce their industrial lending rates.

with the fall in both price and

Official statistic also reveals that

the sector is already in a crisis and

is set to face a major setback in FY02. Frozen foods worth

US\$86.45 million were exported

during the first quarter of current

during the corresponding period of

last financial year. The earning is

already more than \$46 million

short of last fiscal's performance.

fiscal vear, which was \$132.75

demand about 50 per cent.

rate has been kept at six per cent. The government should take In another move, the governimmediate steps for assessing the ment decided to cut interest rate loss of exporters. "Apart from on export advance by about three providing cash incentives and percentage and fix it at seven per sanctioning fresh loans, the intercent especially for the RMG (Ready est rates should be further cut by Made Garment) sector in the wake five per cent as to minimise the loss". These are the demand of the of falling exports in a waning global

e c o n o m y . It may be mentioned here that in Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFFEA). the wake of a global recession, the second highest foreign exchange M.H.Bari earner frozen food sector of the country is facing a major setback

Deputy General Manager Bionic Fish Processing Ltd, Khulna

Global Competitiveness Report

The October 20th issue of the Economist magazine carries a small titbit about the Global Competitiveness Report from the World Economic Forum. Bangladesh has been ranked 71st out of 75 countries that were included.

None of the local papers or Frozen food business is highly politicians seem to have picked up capital intensive. For example, the average value of shrimp of a fully on this. Given the furore with which Transparency Int.'s Corruption loaded container is about U.S. \$.20 Perception Index was received the million. Due to variation of size and muted reaction in Dhaka seems to market demand, packers have to go be strange. MAli, on e-mail