

No respite for RMG

US denies special advantages to Bangladesh

It has been reported that Washington has been lukewarm in response to the requests made by the Bangladesh government for duty and quota free access for its readymade textiles. The weakness of the present state of the US economy and pressure from the US textiles lobby along with existing facilities granted to 72 Caribbean and sub-Saharan countries have been cited as the main reasons. For Bangladesh, whose top export earning ready made garments sector earns 40 per cent from the US alone, this is serious news.

While the world's largest and richest economy has entered a slump which was pushed over the edge by the September 11 attack, the Bangladesh economy will suffer much more given its economic vulnerability. The collateral damage to other sectors as a result of this will also be extensive.

The RMG sector has had a roaring life for the last two decades but was widely predicted to confront a crisis due to changes in the global trade climate. But the real danger is that, we have not sufficiently developed any alternative export sector and had come to depend on a single industry for export earning.

There was a feeling in the policy making and exporting world in the light of the recent Afghan crisis that by extending refueling and overflight facilities to the US, the garments sector would be given some leeway but this hasn't been the case. However, we hope that this will not be the final decision on the matter and the US authorities will find reasons to rethink the issue. This is all the more so that such a decision may have severe socio-political repercussions on many matters.

While Bangladesh is trying to establish a more credible democratic system and has actually gone ahead substantially in this route, the damage to the garments and linked industries will lead to large scale unemployment which may culminate into serious social unrest. That will certainly damage the democratic environment of a huge population, which will cause even regional unease.

At the same time, this is a Muslim majority country that has taken one of the most moderate stand on the recent crisis and it would not want to be seen as supporting a coalition which has been led down by the very same construct when it comes to bread and butter. Realpolitik demands that we should be assisted in creating that space, which leads to policy decisions, undeterred by domestic compulsions.

An immediate area affected may be the gas export sector for which the US is pushing and public opinion in Bangladesh is circumspect. Political leaders will find it difficult to take an independent decision if public opinion is inflamed by the decision, which leads to severe economic loss and large-scale unemployment. So instead of thinking of this as a final setback, let's hope accommodations can be arrived at in view of mutual advantages.

Whatever be the ultimate decision, difficult times are on the chart because global economic climate itself is under a cloud. One hopes that this will be a wake up call to everyone that the world is rapidly changing and we must anticipate and adjust before a crisis hits.

Special committee to investigate minority attacks

Good move, but to be meaningful, it must act quickly

THE Government has decided to set up a special Secretaries committee to investigate the attack on the Hindus. This is appreciated and welcomed. While some would say that it arrives rather late we would say that it's better late than never. Moreover, it can suggest steps to prevent such incidents from happening in future. That is very necessary, very important.

The Daily Star has taken a strong position on the issue and has published numerous reports on the matter. In fact it continues to publish such reports and a series is on even now. We hope to publish more and expect that the said committee will be able to take cognizance of the reports that the media in general has made on the issue.

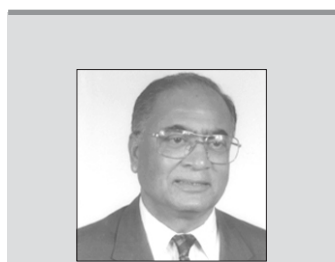
As an extremely powerful body, it will not only have access to confidential reports but will be able to convince the district and lesser level officials to present the facts as they are. The decision to end such incidents ultimately depend on the political will of the government. That means this committee has to deliver what the nation is waiting to hear.

Overwhelming evidence exists that such incidents did take place. Even the government has not denied that in the end. Which is why no wishing away of the incident through a bland committee report will do. Denial of the incidents will be suicidal. It didn't happen everywhere or affect everyone but this is not about the scale and numbers. It's about the moral definition of minority rights and whether Bangladesh can claim to be a multi-community state. It might even lead to regional disturbances. This is a serious matter.

We all have a stake in the success of the committee. By that we mean the victims will be identified and compensated, the perpetrators will be identified and punished and the factors that led to such incidents will be ended. The role of the administrative machinery needs to be evaluated as well.

It may be a big task but nothing less will do.

Awami League's post-election demands and BNP's response



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

IMMEDIATELY after learning the outcome of the last general election, the Awami League's instantaneous reaction was one of stunned incredibility. Having overcome the preliminary spate of shock, came the stage of an all pervasive sadness. This followed the awakening as to what course of action was to be taken. But before a well-thought-out collective decision was taken through deliberation with other leaders, Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina, to the utter surprise of most, made a statement with the allegation that the election had been totally rigged, rejected outcome of the polls and demanded country-wide re-election.

Sheikh Hasina's immediate outburst is not incomprehensible. Having ruled the country for five years, planting well-disposed and chosen officials in vantage election related positions and claiming success in several sectors of the economy, Awami League leaders were totally convinced of their impending victory in the election. During the period they completely neglected the need to control their leaders and supporters from indulging in and abating terrorism, corruption, repression and other social evils. But, to their chagrin, they undervalued the role of the caretaker government and their resolve to hold a free, fair and impartial election by creating a congenial atmosphere for the same.

In fulfilling their task, the head and members of the caretaker government brooked little delay, demonstrated admirable courage and manifested a keen sense of justice and fairness. The Chief Election Commissioner also rose to the occasion. The general public noted with despair brazen acts of mal-governance, subjected themselves to illegal and repressive actions of the ruling party and, finally, suffered from a gross sense

government, and even the head of state himself to defeat the Awami League in election.

The Awami League has not made any statement to substantiate their claim of countrywide rigging of election, including rigging in the 62 constituencies where their own candidates had won. Nor have they cited examples to prove as to what was BNP blueprint to defeat the Awami League in election and the purpose and the

sheaf of paddy. But, if the three eminent conspirators conspired by way of attempting to recover illegal arms, apprehension of known terrorists, de-politicization of administration, ensuring security with deployment of members of Defence Forces, institution of some basic electoral reforms and such other measures, then they really conspired and the people were proud of such conspirators.

The Awami League attempted

the past misdeeds during the Awami League rule and warned that all such actions would be dealt with in accordance with law and no undue interference would be tolerated. The BNP Chairperson even warned her party people not to organize victory celebrations for fear of possible violence. What more could be undertaken?

As for the original declaration of the Awami League Chief that none of their newly elected legisla-

The good offices of the eminent representatives of the countries, which can be generally termed as champions of democracy and good governance, were aimed primarily to witness initiation of actions that would lead to fruitful co-operation in the political arena and allow orderly and constructive criticisms in a democratic setup in Bangladesh. As a result, peace and stability would be restored in the country and people would benefit from resumption of due and unhindered economic activities. The taking of oath by Awami League members of the parliament and their participation in the activities of the focal point of democracy, the parliament, was *sine qua non* for promoting the first stage of such a situation.

The shuttle diplomacy by these diplomats centered round five major demands put forth by the Awami League leaders for consideration of the BNP. These demands had the endorsement of the leader of the Awami League, we were assured, and positive response from the BNP would allow the Awami League to participate in deliberations of the first session of the 8th parliament. The BNP high command deliberated on these points and gave not only positive response to the Awami League's 5-point demands, but assured them that no action would be taken to change the *status quo ante* of the prevailing situation enumerated in those points without consultation with the opposition in parliament. The distinguished emissaries appeared satisfied and left with pleased confidence about success of their mission. But alas, the Awami League retracted. Thus, another fair opportunity for setting up of a good democratic tradition was lost, not only to the dismay of the distinguished overseas friends of Bangladesh but of the people of Bangladesh in general.

M M Rezaul Karim, a former ambassador, is a member of BNP's advisory council.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

The Awami League retracted... another fair opportunity for setting up of a good democratic tradition was lost to the dismay of the people of Bangladesh in general.

of lack of security for life and property. People endured all these silently for want of redress and to avoid risk of recrimination. But, being politically conscious, they waited patiently, took silent revenge at the polls and demonstrated their role as the real source of power in a democratic society.

The above scenario did not occur in the minds of those who comprised the Awami League high command. The Awami League's allegation of total rigging of the election ran counter to the findings of almost all of the numerous election observers, both domestic and international. People laughed at the absurd allegation against quality of the election, which, according to most political analysts, was the most orderly, fair and impartial one ever held in the country. It is understood that most of the Awami League stalwarts also shared the view, but refrained from making any comments, which would contradict or embarrass their leader. In support of their claim, they shamelessly alleged implementation of a BNP blueprint by the Chief Election Commissioner, head of the caretaker

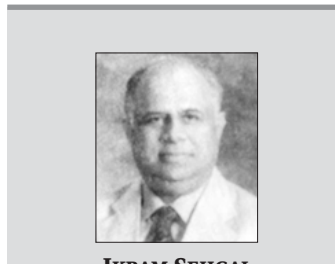
manner the CEC, the caretaker government and the President himself were made to implement it. One must not forget it was the Awami League government, who had appointed the Chief Election Commissioner against the procedural objection of the BNP. It was the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who preferred and waited for the then Chief Justice to finish his term to become Chief Adviser of the caretaker government. Again, it was Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who had threatened to fast if Justice Shahabuddin had declined the post of presidency. It is not comprehensible why and how these three eminent persons, all appointed by the Awami League, turned overnight against the latter and conspired to defeat them in election.

People, on the other hand, say that these so-called conspirators were joined by other conspirators the bulk of the population of the country. It is no secret that on many occasions, voters accepted gifts and facilities from Awami League candidates, carried in their hands voters' slips portraying boat but cast ballots in favour of the

to start a country-wide movement of seizure on 10 October in protest against the election which hardly received any support from people and was a total flop. Then they complained about repression of Awami League workers and members of the minority communities. There can be no denying the fact that such incidents did occur to the dismay of democratic minded citizens, but the allegations were mostly exaggerated and politically motivated. One must also admit that the new government issued stern instructions to all law enforcing agencies to take prompt and appropriate actions against all acts of violence and political vendetta. They also went to the extent of apprehending and taking action within hours against son of a State Minister and brother of a BNP MP for relatively minor offences. They publicized their resolve to receive reports on all politically motivated crimes for due redress straight to higher authorities in the event of failure to receive a fair deal at local level. They had earlier issued stern instructions to their party leaders and workers all over the country not to indulge in acts of revenge of

tors would take oath and attend the first parliamentary session, the primary responsibility lay on the ruling party and, rightly so, to persuade the former to change their attitude. Besides making public appeal by BNP leaders, journalists and members of civil society, some clandestine move was made towards that end. The initiative was taken by some distinguished Ambassadors and High Commissioners representing Heads of Mission of 15 important countries of Europe, North America, East Asia and Oceania. They held a series of meetings with top leaders of both the Awami League and the BNP in two houses in Dhanmandi and Gulshan respectively. They met in Gulshan twice after the results of the election and twice again following formation of the government. It is understood that they had similar meetings in Dhanmandi too. The primary goal of these plenipotentiaries was to act as honest facilitators to help resolve differences between the two principal political parties with a view to setting the process of parliamentary democracy in right track.

Prosecuting the war



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

WHEN diplomatic and economic initiatives fail, military means, i.e. war is the only available option to secure political objectives. With a vast majority of the US population still demanding vengeance in the wake of the September 11 bombing, failure to retaliate would have been tantamount to an open invitation to terrorists of all kinds to target US citizens and interests world-wide. The US had an Hobson's choice, damned if you will, damned if you won't. With the expected Taliban refusal to hand over Osama Bin Laden, the US targeted war on him and his protectors as the very first objective of the "war on terrorism". A civilized society cannot associate itself with terrorists, enough circumstantial evidence was available for Mullah Omar to have distanced himself from his tainted guest.

The US war aims are, viz (1) kill or capture Osama Bin Laden and (2) overthrow the Taliban regime protecting him. The immediate US military objectives in pursuit of these aims are, in four Phases, viz (1) destroy all air force and anti aircraft potential so as to control Afghan skies, (2) destroy such Taliban personnel and defence material interfering with the primary aims, (3) kill or capture Osama Bin Laden and (4) overthrow the Taliban regime. The political phase should come on the conclusion of war, putting in place a broad-based alternative govern-

ment acceptable to the Afghan people. A conventional war would target economic targets, very unnecessary for this impoverished country, and you seldom win the hearts and minds of people by sending them to the graveyards and / or to hospitals. Rest of the world (including Britain and Europe) is now getting restive with continuing civilian casualties. Total air superiority (Phase 1) was achieved in less than 24 hours,

from the rest of Afghanistan, forcing the Taliban into the open for them to cross the killing zone to have a go at you or try to get past you. Without putting ground troops in harm's way astride choke points into Kandahar, there is no blockade. One must understand the terrain and make-up of the population around Kandahar.

Afghanistan's second largest city is situated in a flat area about

Kandahar and Chaman (on the Pakistan border) are mainly the Achakzai tribe, alongwith Nurzai and Alikozai. The Ghilzai dominate the road from Kandahar to Kabul while on the road to Herat around Gereshk we have Popalzai, and also Barakzai, Achakzai, Alizai and Sadozai. The desert is mostly occupied by the Barachi, a tribe mainly into transportation and narcotics, having extensive lands in Sindh. Barakzai and Achakzai

Mujahideen movement by using combat aircraft and HIND helicopter gunships. The Soviets suffered heavily when the induction of the STINGER missiles took out their aircraft, particularly the HIND gunships and M-8/M-17 troop carrying helicopters, quite consistently. Small-unit operations are good enough for "hit and snatch" but not for blockading a large city like Kandahar. Put battalion-sized task forces not only astride the

and Apache helicopters will provide air cover and frustrate any attempt to relieve the blockade from both outside and inside Kandahar. The Taliban risk losing the other cities to the Opposition if they thin out anywhere. Attacking the blockades will mean walking into the killing fields, movement of troops from any direction can be intercepted and pulverized from the air. The cessation of bombing in the rest of Afghanistan will encourage the civilian population to stay home rather than becoming refugees. Let the UN and Red Cross arrange food convoys, including airlifts of medicine and food into the rest of Afghanistan, relieving Pakistan of the refugee burden.

Fighting in built-up area is not recommended. In this game of patience the siege of Kandahar may go well beyond spring into summer, time is on the side of the Coalition. Osama Bin Laden will be forced into the open, at the very least separated from his base of power. Gen Pervez Musharraf has repeatedly called for a short, swift campaign, with a cessation of bombings during Ramadan. Casualties during the holy month will inflame feelings, providing the spark that the religious activists have not been able to ignite the masses to bring them out in the street with. Unless a lucky bomb hits the right target or the Afghans decide enough is enough of Osama, a short campaign will not be possible. Prosecuting the war means pursuing military objectives by military means and not mixing politics with military operations. One must only think of pursuing the requirements of peace once war has been successfully prosecuted. When faced with an unconventional enemy, you have to manoeuvre your opponent to fight you where you are strong, ie. by conventional means on a conventional battlefield of one's own choosing.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

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thereafter, only fuel and ammunition dumps far from civilian population centers should have been targeted in Phase 2.

Engaging with an enemy, steeped in a decade plus of urban and rural guerrilla warfare, capable of living off the land, there is a fall-safe line in target acquisition. Focus on the war aims; why spread your effort and get hate in return particularly when you are straitjacketed in the pursuit of war by severe limiting of acceptable casualties that you can absorb? Bin Laden draws his staying power from proximity to Mullah Omar, who rules by sole edict. Dove-tail Phase 3 and 4 to focus only on them, only on one city, a small area of operations allowing concentration of effort, the creating of inter-connecting fields of fire force-multiplied by air support. The blockade of Kandahar should be the focus of battle, no men or material allowed to flow in or out, the objective being to isolate Mullah Omar (and Osama Bin Laden)

60 kms west of the Pakistan border town Chaman. The river Arghandab runs on a north-east-south west axis and passes a few kms west of Kandahar. Parallel on the same axis, but equidistant from Kandahar on the east, flows the river Tarnak. Further east is the river Argasthan. The main Arghandab runs on an east-west axis about 15-18 kms south of Kandahar. None of the rivers are perennial and all have tracks running alongside or in the river bed itself. North of Kandahar are high mountain ranges. About 45 km south of Kandahar is the Desert where tracks run east to west. There are three major roads, the first one going to Kabul is in very bad condition. The road to Chaman runs south-east through Spin Boldak. Lastly, the road to Herat, runs east-south-east to Gereshk and then on a north-westerly direction to Herat. This big airbase, a few miles south of Kandahar, has Zakir-i-Sharif mountain range parallel to the runway.

Astride the road between

are mostly anti-Taliban, some of the finest Soviet-era Afghan army generals including the hero of Jalalabad, Gen Asif Dillawar, was an Achakzai. Defending Kandahar successfully during the Afghan war was Gen Nurul Haq Aloon, a Barakzai, an artilleryman trained in the US. Another famous general was Achakzai tribal Juma Chak. Good fighters, the tribesmen could be persuaded where their interests are best served. An Afghan is an ally if his ego and friendship is stroked, a stubborn enemy if he is attacked. Because of the bombing, the Barakzai have pledged their loyalty to Mullah Umar even ahead of the Nurzai, and the Nurzais are closer to the Taliban. Afghan loyalties can be won over but the widespread bombing and the "Haq episode" has put a dampener on such efforts.

The Soviet used Spetsnaz special forces troops on high mountain peaks and/or choke points with latest weapons and hi-tech gadgets to interdict any

choke points in the south like Takhtapol-Torkotal, 20 kms on the road to Chaman but also Maiwand 25-30 kms on the road to Herat, establish blocking positions in the north leading to the mountains and on the choke points along the three rivers. Take over Bund-e-Daillah also, the dam feeding water to Kandahar. The route to Chaman must be kept open for refugees from Kandahar. A brigade plus task force (4 battalions) can be deployed astride the Hada Hills range to create a funnel to the Pakistan border and into properly supervised holding camps for the screening of refugees, this to be carried out by a Pakistani Brigade plus deployed within Pakistan borders on Khwaja Amran Rang mountain range (defences were made by the British against a "Czarist invasion" during Empire days).

The area, 10 kms on all sides around the choke points and the funnel should be a free-fire zone. Fighter aircraft, AC-130 gunships

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

Is CNN irrelevant?

Am I the alone in coming to the conclusion that CNN is irrelevant, especially as far as the viewpoint of the "Third World" is concerned? This comes out very clearly whenever there is a crisis in the West. Take for example the current one: The constant barrage of "only the American viewpoint, the plethora of American "hero", the wave of national self pity, the reluctance in admitting the obvious (civilian casualties in Afghanistan), no in depth analyses outside the official American line, etc. makes you wonder whether it is an arm of the US State Department. It is definitely not an "international" channel by any standards, except maybe for the weather reports. Even in normal times the channel behaves as if it "produces" rather than reports news.

More power to regional channels - well done Al Jazeera; we need stations like you in our part of the world.

Nafis Ahmed, on e-mail

A difficult war

I want to discuss about Mahmud's

arguments (October 30). He gave a reply to Samia Khan's letter. The statement of Samia Khan was the people are upset because when any terrorist of any different faith commit any heinous crime they are not called Christian or Buddhist or Jewish or Hindu terrorist. He gave the reason this by saying that there are no terrorist organisations except the Al Qaeda attacking others in the name of God! He added: "Imagine how we would feel as a nation and as Muslims if some terrorist attacked our country in the name of, say Christ or Buddha. We can't even control our own people in going on a rampage against Bangladesh minorities over a simple election result and here we are telling the US what they should and shouldn't do after they were attacked so viciously on September 11."

We will never become happy if any terrorist attacks our country in the name of Christ or Buddha. But in this case are you confident that the Al Qaeda group led by Osama Bin Laden has attacked WTC? Do you have any evidence or have you been seen any evidence presented by the US government? No. Because they don't have any evi-

dence so how can they show it before you?

It's nothing but only the war against Islam. Be sure that US will never kill Laden because if they do so, they won't be able to continue this war. They are changing statements of objectives: firstly it was to get Laden, then the entire Al Qaeda network and recently to rout out terrorist everywhere. Purpose is to continue the war and they want to attack on the general Muslims. What you will say about the repeat bombing in the Redcross warehouse or in the hospital. It wasn't the warehouse or hospital of Laden or Al Qaeda group!

You also compared attacks on minorities in our country with the retaliation attack by America. But this two can't be compared with each other because if the attack is really done by BNP, the Gov. has already taken steps to protect the life and properties of the Hindus. US Gov. is not doing so but retaliating. And you want to support this?

This war is supposed to be waged by worldwide coalition. But alas! We have nothing to do. In our religion it is said that if you see

anything wrong you should protest that. If you can't, you should talk against that. If you can't even talk you should hate that from your heart. That is the minimum duty towards Imam. As a Muslim now we have nothing to do but hate both the attacks. On WTC and attack on Afghanistan. Because both attacks are against humanity and human rights.

Naushad
BRAC University, on e-mail

Bangladesh and India coming closer

The relation between Bangladesh and India is likely to improve, with India now in the US camp, and Pakistan under duress.

The Indo-Pak relations would improve in a later phase, after the Kashmir issue is settled. Pakistan might get a consolation prize on the resolution of the Kashmir dispute (the brokers under severe duress). Both India and Pakistan cannot afford to continue the silly stance for more decades, politically and economically, in the seamless Saarc region, as Uncle Sam desires.

The three per cent trade

between the Saarc members is a stark reality of the bankrupt political statesmanship. The politics in Bangladesh is also bankrupt, thanks to the conformity movement in the region (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal all suffering from political tantrums). Saarc will no longer be dormant and passive as the big powers are actively interested in the future dividends. The impact of Saarc unity will reverberate globally - the voice of one and a half billion people descendant from ancient civilisations.

AH

Dhaka

Micro-leaders

I have been a voter for more than 45 years, and I am sick of petty-minded non-personalities whom we prop up as national leaders. Their outlook and vision are microscopic, and they cannot see beyond their nose. They are national liabilities on national expense account.

They cannot accept to be loser under any circumstances. They are public agitators to grind their own axe, to remain in power by hook or

by crook. And when in power they misuse it right and left, and in the center, and squeeze public assets, instead of adding to the national wealth.

They are detestable and should be thrown out of public life, lock stock and barrel; and the nation would not be a loser. They have spoiled the younger generation, who would be prone to imitate their lousy moral standards. Only saboteurs spoil the future prospects of a nation.

It is good to note that this time the voters have shown their verdict in no uncertain times. Get rid of the nagging leaders, bickering all the time, in and out of the season. Once in a while there is a time to be pleasant, and to offer good wishes, and radiate benevolence. Why cannot we see the good in others?

A citizen

Dhaka

Reasons realised

The Awami League chief and the leader of the largest opposition party in the 8th Parliament has opened a new chapter of complain against her party's defeat in the October 1, 2001 election. She

realised and accepted in her public meeting at Paltan Maidan on 28.10.2001 that the defeat was due to her refusal to export gas.

At the early stage of election on 1.10.2001 and up to the date 27.10.2001 before her public meeting on 28.10.2001 she discovered only one exclusive reason of her defeat that was "crude rigging". But in her public meeting on 28.10.2001 she deviated from the reason of defeat from crude rigging to refusal of gas export.

Perhaps after some days, she will further realise to accept that the defeat was due to her open language and lack of leadership quality.

Nur Hossain
Bangshal Road, Dhaka

The president's speech

President Shahabuddin Ahmad's address to the inaugural session of JS has generated criticism from different quarters. The Awami League chief in her reaction said that the president has lost his acceptability. Another group is questioning the timing of the

speech. But Abdus Samad Azad, a senior leader of the Awami League, termed Mr. Shahabuddin Ahmed a betrayer long before this so-called controversial speech was delivered. Can we ask Mr. Azad why? Didn't he forget that Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed signed controversial bills like the Public Safety Act, the Banga Bandhu Family Ordinance, etc. Of course, you are good if you support me without questioning me, but you are bad if you don't support me unilaterally.

In Bangladesh except the leaders and supporters of the Awami League everyone is corrupt, razzak, etc. Jamat-e-Islami is a party of anti-liberation forces when it supports BNP, but they become pro-liberation when they support the AL. General Ershad is a corrupt man if he does not support the AL, but he is honest if he helps AL to bring down the BNP government.

I urge upon Sheikh Hasina and the leaders of the Awami League to find out their identity first.
Aklima Zaman
Richmond, USA, on e-mail