

Our greetings to the new President

Urge him to be nation's conscience-keeper

OUR felicitations to Dr A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury on his assumption of office as the sixteenth President of Bangladesh. But in our annals of parliamentary form of government as distinguished from the presidential system he is the fourth one to be on the roll of honour as the head of state. He brings to bear on the highest office of the state his commitment to public well-being not merely as a distinguished physician but also by virtue of his vast experience in public life as a political practitioner with a flair for elocution to go with it. He has been an invincible winner of parliamentary seats every time he contested for the same and became Deputy Prime Minister during the Zia regime within a couple of years of his joining politics in 1978. But the most important of his credentials worthy of instant mention in the present context would be his experience as the Deputy Leader of the House during 1991-1996 and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Parliamentary Party between 1996 and 2001. The hands-on role he was called upon to play in both the capacities makes him ideally suited to be perceptive of the sensibilities of the ruling and opposition parties in alternating sequences. This could stand him in good stead in the event that his good offices were in demand to resolve any crisis situation.

Like Biswas during the BNP's earlier stint in power, Dr Badruddoza has become the county's president by party choice not by a consensual choice, in the tacit sense, that is. What makes his election to the presidency so significant, and even demanding, is the fact that he has been the choice of an alliance commanding a highly consequential two-thirds majority in parliament. This places a high premium on Dr Badruddoza's neutral image as president which he has rightly vowed to uphold on being declared elected to the office by the Election Commission last Monday.

It is, of course, the ruling party's prerogative to elect a president but once a person becomes the president he is elevated from the narrow partisanship on to a higher pedestal. For, he belongs then to the whole nation and all political parties. He has to act by the Constitution which entitles him to 'advise' and be 'advised' as well. We have had the legacy of political parties turning to the president in times of stress. In that sense, the nation attaches a very high degree of importance to the moral authority of the president. We have no doubt Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury has the qualities of head and heart to prove equal to the task his high office places on his shoulders.

We wish the new president Godspeed.

What Kabul's fall means for the future?

It must be followed by a realistic initiative to install peace

KABUL has fallen and the hitherto defending Taleban soldiers have run away to the hills and the border zones of Pakistan. But the situation in the country remains dangerously fluid. The Northern Alliance may not have formally taken over but its presence, as the power that replaced the Taleban is clear. It dominates the immediate military and political skyline of that battered land. And this overrunning by events of diplomacy and planning presents new configurations that need to be managed.

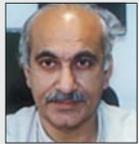
The end of extreme violence is of course great news. With the Taleban on the run and the Northern Alliance in control of Kabul and most of Afghanistan, the bombing can immediately stop. That means the relief and food supply operations of the international agencies can intensify without delay. The winter is nearly here and the incredible devastation that the country has experienced would make any relief operations very difficult in "normal" time. With the war on, this would have been a near impossible task. Failure of that initiative would have meant threat to hundreds of thousands of lives. Now that bombing is not necessary, the international community should spring to action.

To ensure that hostilities don't spring up again, a multi-ethnic provisional government has to be set up in Kabul to pave the way for elections. The hostility between the Pashtun-dominated Taleban and the Tajik, Uzbek and other ethnic groups-dominated Northern Alliance has a long history of blood bathing. Unless the Pashtuns are properly represented in the management of Afghanistan the situation will not improve at all. And it's not just Pakistan that will become unstable but the region as a whole. The denial of that broad governing alliance may also be a rallying ground for the Talebans to initiate renewed hostilities against the Kabul government, thus lessening chances of enduring peace.

The Northern Alliance has said that it will abide by earlier commitments and form a coalition government enjoying everyone's support. The demand for a UN-brokered administration has also been heard from numerous stakeholders. The UN, which has been sidelined in the conflict phase, must now be allowed to play its role in the emerging peace phase.

For many years, the outside world has altered the Afghan scene to match its own priorities. After such a long journey through death and despair, the powerful of the world should allow what is best for the Afghan people to be done. For once let the Afghans decide.

All the views that's fit to print



M.J. AKBAR

LITTLE streaks of white jet-smoke in the sky over Washington speak of the new security mood in the United States. The Air Force has intensified its vigil over skies that once were immune from the problems that beset ordinary mortals in the rest of the world. But it would take more than one Air Force, even America's, to provide any sense of aerial comfort to New York, whose skies are a mass of red commercial dots as craft of every kind descends on the airports that thrive with the world's attention. This is the city that the world visits every day and every night.

September 11 is too traumatic to disappear from the consciousness so quickly; maybe it never will. But there is evidence that the depression is lifting. The vigour is back in the neon, and chatter is back on the sudden intimacy-wavelength that connects strangers on the streets.

Reminiscence dominates the content of print media, even as television descends to boredom with its repetitive formula of green squiggles purporting to be still life from Afghanistan and analysis that now shrieks in order to be heard above the drone. Print has become once again the most powerful means of communication, employing as it does the brain above the camera. Magazines like the venerable *New Yorker* and the newborn *Talk* are at their best. *Talk* is edited by Tina Brown; Hillary Clinton helped make the first issue about two years ago a bestseller by discussing her husband's infidelities. The latest issue has a piece by Chelsea Clinton, who, like her father, is now studying at Oxford. She was in Manhattan on 11 Sep-

tember, staying with a friend. She called her mother the moment the sky exploded and the earth trembled. An assistant to her mother picked up the phone, and then the line went dead. Like the rest of the world Chelsea was hypnotised by the television screen. Then she heard the deafening rumble of the first tower and the only image she could think of was Humpty Dumpty. Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall... Humpty Dumpty had a big fall... She went out. People were flying

for only a few hours. Dick Cheney probably became a victim of his own reputation. When he and George Bush were elected, he was applauded as the heavyweight who would provide the ballast for a lightweight administration. The joke was that George Bush was only a heartbeat away from the presidency. After the towers collapsed and the Pentagon fell, George Bush disappeared from the radar screen on the advice of his rattled secret service (the CIA is paying a price

World Trade Center twin towers had the false intimacy of television, on a day of perfect reception." For some reason I imagine Uppdike hammering these words out on a battered Olympia typewriter, perhaps because I first read him in the late Sixties. In 2001 he saw history outside the duplicate image as well. "And then, within an hour, as my wife and I watched from the Brooklyn building's roof, the south tower dropped from the screen of our viewing; it fell straight down like an

picked up his three nephews, aged 10, 13 and 19. He tortured the eldest, including with mock execution; a bullet went past his head hitting the wall behind. Nothing very new there. Peyrard's arrest was more illuminating. He was paraded through the marketplace as a spy. A few people threw desultory stones at him, but most ignored him. That begins to tell a tale.

Peyrard made friends with his jailers, and they once took him out for a spin through the town on the

BYLINE

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through the avenues like debris through a storm, shouting "Fire!" and "Bomb!" She writes: "We were all crying. We all thought we were literally going to have fire rain down on us... For a brief moment I truly thought I was going to die. Once we stopped running, I started praying. I prayed for my country and my city..."

THE Clintons are tough. Bill Clinton has chosen this week to remind America that Americans too once used terror to serve their interests. Against Red Indians, who they wiped out; and against the Blacks, who they enslaved. The right wing is predictably outraged by Clinton's "insensitivity". But Clinton has the attention of an America in an introspective mood. The search for something, anything, even perhaps an answer, is on and the bookshops are flooded with Islam, Afghanistan and conflict. For the conservatives so far, war is the only response. The right wing leadership, which is in charge, knows that this is hopelessly inadequate but will not admit it readily. It is in disarray.

The news from the White House, provided over lunch by an old friend who has one ear parked inside, is that the vice president, Dick Cheney, is, to use power parlance, "dead meat". He made a fatal mistake on 11 September. He used the opportunity provided by a vacuum to usurp the President's power, albeit

today for that rattle, incidentally). Cheney sent out word that he was in charge. He did an Al Haig. When Ronald Reagan was shot in an attempted assassination his secretary of state Haig similarly "took charge". Haig was eased out. *Less mjaesele* can be fatal, even in a democracy. Today, power in Washington has four faces, in descending order of importance. George Bush is of course at the top, very much so. Donald Rumsfeld, defence secretary is second. Then Colin Powell, newly assertive in a job he was initially uncomfortable with. And Condoleezza Rice whose personal equation with the President continues to thrive.

PERHAPS the finest magazine cover I have seen is that of the *New Yorker* of 24 September. It is black, but not stark black. Not until you stare at the black does the silhouette of the twin towers begin to emerge, black against black. It is stark, simple, and has the beauty of a definitive statement. Inside John Uppdike is in fine fettle; his writing is descriptive, his art devoid of the need for artifice. "Suddenly summoned to witness something great and horrendous, we keep fighting not to reduce it to our smallness. From the viewpoint of a tenth floor apartment in Brooklyn Heights, where I happened to be visiting some kin, the destruction of the

elevator, with a tinkling shiver and a groan of concussion distinct across the mile of air."

Life is obstinate. "The next morning, I went back to the open vantage from which we had watched the tower so dreadfully slip from sight. The fresh sun shone on the eastward facades, a few boats tentatively moved in the river, the ruins were still sending out smoke, but New York looked glorious."

The most revealing stories from Afghanistan are those that describe the war for survival, conducted each day by a hungry, condemned people in a world where electricity is a dream. The most evocative that I have come across is the account of a French reporter, Michel Peyrard, who works for *Paris Match*. He slipped across the Pakistan border and went to Jalalabad wearing a tentop, head-to-toe burqa as disguise. The thought of hardboiled journalists searching for stories in a burqa is faintly ludicrous, but a journalist is never too far away from the thin line that divides his demands from desperation.

The Taliban in charge of the jail where Peyrard was kept for 25 days was 24 years old. Peyrard calls him a megalomaniac, but all jailers are like that, aren't they? You've seen the movies too, haven't you? When one prisoner escaped, the jailer

excuse that he needed to go to a hospital. In return he had offered them lunch. More information here. The relationship was relaxed. The jailers were also hungry for a good meal. And they had not stolen their prisoner's money, otherwise our journalist could not have made the offer. This excursion came to an abrupt end when they saw a group of militants on the street. Rather than risk being stopped and questioned they went back to jail. The government therefore is a mix of the ideologically committed and the salaried. The most revealing quote comes from one of the guards, who is young and who is sick of the Taliban regime. Why? He wants to hear music, he says. He has not heard music ever since the Taliban have taken over. But when Peyrard shows him an American propaganda leaflet dropped from safe skies (the skies, as one sceptical journalist in Washington said, have been saved from mullahs on magic carpets) the young Afghan explodes. What are the Americans doing here? he asks. What do they know about our customs? B52s have this terrible tendency of arousing nationalism.

WHEN embassies negotiate interviews on behalf of their Prime Ministers they should probably haggle over display as well. The *Washington Post* did interview

OPINION

Increasing interests, vanishing values

TANVIR A. KHAN

TWO remarkable texts so far worth reading in order to understand the appropriation of the world's resources by the only superpower and its coalition allies has been circulating in the intellectual circle in Dhaka.

One of these has been published by *The Daily Star* on October 29, 2001 by Arundhati Roy titled "War is peace". The other is a testimony by John J. Maresca, Vice President, International Affairs, Unocal Corporation. This was presented to the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Washington D.C. on February 12, 1998.

Both the papers provide interesting feedback to how the minds of the policy planners at Capitol Hill work. Their blueprint of self-serving interests and the subsequent strategies to fool the whole world could easily be understood if the people at large and particularly the Americans at home and abroad could have read and digested the contents.

Those who understand and go the anti-people way are definitely "evils" (to quote George Bush's favourite term). Those who sympathize and cannot do anything about it are at least half way. Those who want to do something about it should pro-actively get together and motivate the world leaders-gone-astay to stop their chauvinistic and thoughtless desires to keep the world's resources to themselves. These people are the ones that matter the most since they can stop

the madness of the Bush-Blair entourage from destroying the spirit of the world becoming unified to serve the cause of humankind.

How a Labour party stalwart as Tony Blair could side with a Republican as George Bush Jr. in this mindless bashing of the innocent women and children in Afghanistan is rather mind-boggling. But the answer to the query is easy and simple since history is replete with examples of appropriation when money becomes the sole factor for your existence. Both of these gentlemen are church goers I believe, but it seems none of them had taken any lessons from the Bible that "dust to dust" is what you are going to get at the end of the day.

There is no reason for the people of the world to tell George Bush that what happened on September 11, 2001 is heinous and below the belt. No one in their right minds could accept what has happened that day. But why should he be the only conscience of the world and all others play second fiddle? As a citizen of the world, a sane person cannot condone the act. But to report to him and become either a friend or a foe is tantamount to international terrorism with him as the central godfather.

Let us analyze the feedback received from both the authors. Arundhati refers to what Madeline Albright had to state about the role of the UN and America's current stance. Albright said, "The US acts multilaterally when it can, and unilaterally when it must." The bombing at Afghanistan was unilat-

eral although George Bush later had its allies form the coalition. There was no effort by the UN until now.

The most important section of Arundhati's article is where she refers to the group which has full control of the oil industry, hardware and software industry in the armaments sector, and most importantly the media (particularly CNN, BBC and the Sky News). The plethora of names (Frank Carlucci, Donald Rumsfeld, James Baker III, George Soros, Fred Malek, George Bush Jr. & Sr., Dick Cheney, etc.) have a significant hand in the running of this Afghanistan bashing. If someone asks with what objectives in mind that would be a very interesting query!

John Maresca answers those queries in his testimony of Feb 12, 1998, which allegedly forms the blueprint for the US led attack in Afghanistan. Identifying possible routes for laying down the oil pipeline to carry oil to the South and South-east Asian markets has been the determining factor. After having done quite a lot of homework, the most cost-effective route has been identified, the option across Afghanistan which has its own unique challenges. Constructing a pipeline 1,040-mile long "would provide more favourable netbacks to oil producers through access to higher value markets than those currently being accessed through the traditional Baltic and Black Sea export routes."

There is considerable international and regional political interest in this pipeline. "Asian crude oil

importers particularly from Japan, are looking to Central Asia and the Caspian as a new strategic source of supply to satisfy their desire for resource diversity." Who are the main actors in this whole game? "The pipeline benefits Central Asian countries because it would allow them to sell their oil in expanding and highly prospective hard currency markets. The pipeline would benefit Afghanistan, which would receive revenues from transport tariffs, and would promote stability and encourage trade and economic development."

Would the countries, which have these resources, be the gainers or companies like Unocal spear-headed by that group of usurpers would be siphoning off the surplus remains the moot question.

The latter in all likelihood would be the gainers since they bulldoze any decisions by conveniently manipulating the amount of gas or oil under the earth's surface in the number-crunching game. Off-late Bangladesh has also become the target. The yawning gap between 20 trillion cft (with 95% confidence level) to 60 tcf (with 5% confidence level) of reserves has been the continuum of discussion. The co-opted policy planners of Bangladesh along with their bosses of the west had been trying hard to convince the people of Bangladesh that gas export is necessary since Bangladesh has enough reserves to last them fifty years.

John Maresca very well eulogizes that the US feels the world is their property. He opines that "al-

though Unocal has not negotiated with any one group, and does not favour any group, we have had contacts with and briefings for all of them. We know that the different factors in Afghanistan understand the importance of the pipeline project for their country, and have expressed their support of it."

The current events do not seem to suggest that this support is coming willingly, rather by force. Even Pervez Musharraf had waited till the time Mazar-I-Sharif was captured to go to the US. The bargain, if one can call it that, has brought a US\$1 billion aid package and the lifting of sanctions. Mr. Musharraf wants that the bombing should stop before Ramzan and that Kabul should not remain in the hands of the Northern Alliance. In the future, the "moderate Taliban" (Musharraf's desire) should be a part of the government.

The contention then is the oil reserves at Turkmenistan, which will serve the US for the next thirty years. Why is it so important that the US is so hell bent on capturing Afghanistan and appeases Pakistan? This pipeline would begin "near the town of Chardzhou, in northern Turkmenistan, and extend southeasterly through Afghanistan to an export terminal that would be constructed on the Pakistan coast of the Arabian Sea. Only about 440 miles of the pipeline would be in Afghanistan."

The 42-inch diameter pipeline will have a shipping capacity of one million barrels of oil per day, which would cost US\$2.5 billion approximately. The Trans Alaska Pipeline is

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, but the interview was done by a reporter, Alan Sipress, rather than the editor, as had been promised. The interview appeared on page 26. A story on the social impact of the economic plunge in Argentina got double column space on page one, but the leader of the world's sixth nuclear power was shoved off inside on a day that, frankly, was not bursting with news. Beside the Vajpayee interview, and given more space than the interview itself, was a story from the *Post* bureau in Delhi on POTO, the prevention of terrorism ordinance. I suppose they could have held over the POTO story, but they had probably declared 8 November India Day at the *Washington Post*. Since there is so much competition in these matters, the Pakistanis have gone to the *New York Times*.

The *New York Times* published the interview with President Pervez Musharraf on Saturday morning, on page one.

The American media is cool with all leaders, including George Bush. The President of the United States gave an address to the nation on Thursday evening. NBC passed the televised address to its news subsidiaries, MSNBC and CNBC. CBS simply passed up the honour, as did public television. Fox wanted to put it on prime time, using what it called Level 1 intervention to break into money-making serials. But they saw an advance copy of the text and decided that the President wasn't making news. They junked the story. ABC was the only channel that carried the telecast, because it did not have a moneyspinner slotted at that hour.

STORY OF THE MONTH: The CIA wants to hire someone who knows Arabic. And Pushtu. A bit late, but nevertheless... On the other hand, why don't they just subcontract spying on the Arab and Asian world to the British? They would do it better, and at discount rates.

M.J. Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age

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

"Harrowing tales of depravity"

I was shocked when I read this report in *The Daily Star* and I was also shocked at Ashfaq A. Chowdhury's letter claiming that the report did not do any service to our society.

When a newspaper writes anything against the party of their choice (in this case BNP), it becomes an Awami newspaper to these types of people. Shame on you.

I am happy that the DS reported the harrowing tales of depravity of the minorities and these types of reports should regularly be published. Thank you Daily Star.

Z. Hoque, on e-mail

Response to Rouchell

This is in response to Mr Rouchell's letter ("Who we are, and what we stand for", 14 November). You sound like you are God or something.

So this is the sort of mentality you harbour for us! But I'm sure you do it because you want something from us, you are not doing out of sheer goodness of your heart. You sound

so biased and ignorant of what's going on. May God bless people like you and show you the right path
Sharmin Zaman
USA

The Muslim world and the US

All the hue and cry and the letters about this war and whether the US is doing right and things like that is totally a wastage of time and effort. It is always easy to find fault with others rather than one's own self. We are criticising the US foreign policy and Israel but what about the Muslim nations? What have we done about ourselves? If all these oil rich Arab countries have said "solve the Palestinian problem or else we won't sell oil to the west", wouldn't it have changed the US foreign policy? But the Arabs are not going to say that because they need the US protection to maintain the royal family. And we, the so-called Muslims never protest against the policies of the Muslim countries but are very prompt to move against the US and others. This is utter hypocrisy.

Ours is one of the so-called secular countries yet some of us kill

and rape the minorities while others don't do anything even after knowing what is going on! In the US till now I haven't heard of any mass killing or looting of Muslim population. What would have been the state of the minorities of Bangladesh if some Indian Hindus had blown off the Secretariat or Baitul Mokarram (to Americans, the WTC is as significant as the mosque to us)? I shudder to think!

That really justifies the beating we Muslims are getting all over the world. We are really more Munafegs than Muslim. And Allah hates Munafegs more than the non-believers.

Talat Islam
Los Angeles, USA

Looking more closely

After reading the letter of the US envoy on DS editorial and re-reading the same in *The Daily Star* published on November 7 and 5 respectively, I have found out to the conclusion of the ongoing US war against Afghanistan in the following story.

A ferocious predatory beast sees a deer drinking water on the other side of a canal. The beast, having an appetite for that deer, finds out an

excuse by claiming that it defiled the water and now it has to be punished. Protesting such absurd idea the deer asserts that the water is flowing from the beasts side. The beast then declares that in that case the deer's father did it. And without giving the innocent deer any chance to defend itself, the beast at once kills it and has its delicious meal for the day.

Shahidul Islam Chowdhury
Raozan, Chittagong

Why USA?

There is no terrorist attack on China, Russia, England, Japan, Germany or France. Then why has the USA have always been the target of the terrorists? Is it because of their attitude towards the Muslims in the Middle East? Would the Americans search their hearts for the cause of these terrorist attacks? The hearts of the Muslims in Palestine and Iraq have been bleeding since long with no sign of improvement due to the one sided policy of America. Naturally it has made some people desperate, resulting in terrorist attack on the USA as the IRA is making terrorist attacks on England.

SK A Wadud
Kalabagan, Dhaka

An American opinion

The letter "An American opinion" (October 30) shocked us. The writer who preferred to remain anonymous spewed venom throughout the letter. In one place he/she spitefully wrote, "How many Bangladeshi children has America fed? America is the largest humanitarian organisation in the world." In another place he/she addressed to Bangladeshis, "May be it is time for your news sources to tell the world some accurate information about the USA. When Osama Bin Laden and his terrorists become heroes and the American humanitarians become the enemy there is definitely something wrong...If you support him so much, then welcome him into your living room and stop taking US dollars to feed your children."

We do not know who is responsible for the 11th September incident because so many countries have bitter feelings about America for its unjust foreign policy, not acting without self interest and looking down on people and not counting them as human beings.

It is very surprising that the letter writer is ignorant of the fact that there are so many justified motives

to hate America, bitter by its policies towards other countries. There are so many countries effected by America's actions. For example, Iraq where one hundred thousand people died by bombardment of missiles and bombs, two million children have died from economic embargoes and people are still starving to death.

Palestinians are being slaughtered by an American funded and backed Israeli military, 3.4 million Palestinians are still displaced and fifty thousand Palestinians have been killed.

Africa has much reason to hate America as they enslaved entire western coast of that continent and according to some historical scholars numbers of killed and enslaved are near 15 million.

In Japan three hundred and fifty thousand people died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by nuclear bombs and people are still suffering from the radiation.

Afghanistan, Sudan, Pakistan, Libya were bombed by USA, in Bosnia arms embargo was imposed on Bosnia Muslims and it became difficult for them to fight the Serbs.

The list will go on and on, USA has earned billions of dollars be

selling instruments of destruction to other countries. There goes the saying "As you sow, so will you reap." We do not support terrorism, we feel deeply sad for the victims of the September 11 incident but the irony of it is that America itself is responsible for this attack. Power should be combined with justice, understanding and kindness. I hope the 'An American' has now got a clear picture why anyone could have bitter feelings against America.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

"Our reader, our letter writer and us"

Thank you Afsan Chowdhury for your excellent column (November 14). I read it in one breath. I also laud *The Daily Star's* decision to allocate more space to letters and to publish full-page letters on three days a week. I shall term it as democratisation of newspaper.

We have seen two decades (1972-1990) of controlled media (or autocracy) of media. In 1991-2001 period, newspaper boldly reported many events, which raised con-

sciousness of people, made people aware of things. Unprecedented voters turn out and the result in 1996 and 2001 election, is the effect of raise of consciousness of people.

However media also have some lacuna. Some newspapers often take biased views. Most columnists are not honest to themselves.

Earlier the letter column used to be a complaint box. I was a reader of daily Ittefaq in the 70s. The letter I used see there for e.g. appeal to open post office or 'to repair road in a district town' etc. The readers express their views on national and international issues. Readers talk about politics, economics and environment. Readers talk about Bangladesh, Afghanistan or USA. Readers write from Dhaka, Mymensing, California or Canada. People express opinion, people shows disagreement, peoples agree and enrich others logic. It's (Reader's letter column) a wonderful place for exchanging views.

Shawkat Hossain
Lalmatia, Dhaka