

## De-activation of JCD central committee

Let the right signal now go to other committees

**P**RIME Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has done well to suspend the functioning of the central committee of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the ruling party's student wing. She has responded to a pressing need for exerting her authority over the wayward trend-setter committee. We thank her for asserting her will early in the day.

Within a few weeks of the BNP-led four-party alliance's ascension and once setting in, the quiet satisfaction and calm composure over their landslide victory evaporated as reports of highly culpable activities of their student wing came to raise eye-brows. Newspapers were replete with reports on the capture of residential halls in the universities by violent means and the pervasive extortionist behaviour, including the aggressive scramble for tender schedules - all the vices ironically that people wanted to see banished following the verdict in the October 1 elections.

Let's reiterate that it is from inside that a ruling party's rot begins and once setting in it will fester like a cluster of cancerous cells unless excoriated early in the day. The process of decay is almost invariably spearheaded by none other than the student or youth front of the party. They start committing all kinds of excesses basking in the belief of an impunity based on assumptions: (a) the party in power owed them some debt-servicing for the 'contribution' they had made towards its electoral victory; and (b) their services ought to remain in high demand, regardless of how they carried themselves. In the process, the goodwill with which the victorious political party begins its rule is spoilt in no time as the authority of the government is eroded to a dysfunctional state.

We recall that when in the Opposition Begum Zia had been assertive with JCD central committees once or twice earlier on. The fact that she has done so as chief of the ruling party this time around means that she is alive to the dangers of allowing her student wing a long rope from a position of power. She should carry on.

Even though some short-sighted elements in her party might try to dissuade her from a follow-up on this first step saying it would be impolitic on her part to do it, we would urge her to stay the course; for, she has the advantage of the whole government machinery, including the intelligence agencies, at her disposal to succeed in neutralising criminal elements in her party wings or ranks.

So, let it not be a half-measure merely ending with the suspension of the JCD central committee. We want the outlying JCD committees, especially those which have been reported against, to be de-activated as well. Basically, a tab must be kept on all JCD units with the signal going across to them that any excess committed by them will be met with instant punitive action.

## Strike at BSMMUH

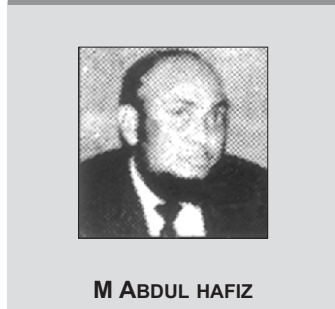
Why hold the patients hostage?

**I**F Shamsunnahar, a senior staff nurse at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH), died due to wrong treatment, as her colleagues at the hospital claim, there should definitely be an inquiry. Upon inquisition, the doctor found guilty should definitely be punished. There is no scope for a debate here. However, what we find disturbing and even deplorable and what, we know, has become a norm these days, is the unjust means nurses and Class III and IV employees of the BSMMUH have adopted to press home their demands.

The strike, set to enter its fourth consecutive day, is only compounding miseries of the patients at the hospital. The agitators have no right whatsoever to take it out on people seeking medical attention at different wings of the hospital. If Shamsunnahar's death were to be attributed to sheer negligence of the doctors, the nurses and their comrades on strike should also have to bear the responsibility for deterioration of any patient's condition. They should realise it is people's life and death they are dealing with; therefore, they cannot decide not to work, exposing patients to mortal risk, just because one of their colleagues died due to wrong treatment.

The BSMMUH authorities have to shoulder the responsibility for having brought the situation to such a pass. They should have opened up a channel of communication with the disgruntled nurses and other employees at the very beginning. Assurances of a scooping investigation as to what went wrong could have pre-empted the strike the hospital is now reeling under. Anyway, a probe committee has been formed and we hope to find out within days whether there has been any negligence on the part of the doctor who treated Shamsunnahar. In the meantime, we hope that the nurses and Class III and IV employees would go back to work immediately.

# Fall of Kabul: A crucial new phase



M ABDUL HAFIZ

**T**HE victory in war once belonged only to the braves. It was their prowess that wrested it from the opponent. Now it is the preserve of anyone capable of mastering brute force to be combined with cunning disguised as diplomacy and handsome largesse in cash and kind in the name of humanitarian aids. Then the media is, of course, there to chart the course of the conflict and shape its outcome. Nothing could be more convincing to prove the validity of this changed norm than the fall last week of Kabul where an intrepid Taliban force was literally pulverized under the sheer weight of the world's mightiest military machine. Added to it were also the invaders' tricks and tacts as well as their pressure, coercion and intimidation with the leverages available with them to keep the world of Islam divided along variety of lines (militant vs moderate, secularists vs fundamentalists and so on), confused and incapacitated so that they could not put up any united stand against the war of vengeance. The support of the countries, organisations, groups and individuals was co-opted, where necessary with 'bribe', to collaborate with them and to encourage defection in the ranks of the defenders. So, the victory is no more the product of the valour alone, it can be manipulated as it was done during operation 'Enduring Freedom'. But who was really the winner?

If it was the Northern Alliance which physically marched on to Kabul, it did so riding the chariot of massive American air support. When the Taliban defences were sufficiently 'softened' with over a month's pounding with bombs which were only being nuclear warheads in lethality, then only could the alliance 'contact' their ferocious

enemy in the front line. Meanwhile the buoyant Pentagon officials also claimed the victory to be theirs'. After all, it was their war and continues to be so until its other objectives to catch bin Laden dead or alive and destroy his al-Qaeda networks are achieved. But then they fought the war only from the safety of high altitude with no resistance either in the air or from ground below. Their only ground mission near Kandahar ended in fiasco. They never touched

conduct. In this difficult setting the Pushtun majority of the country dominated over the rest of the Afghans ever since Ahmad Shah Abdali, himself a Durranis Pushtun, formed a confederation of Afghan tribes in 1747. The Durranis ruled Afghanistan for more than two hundred years and were successful in making the diverse Afghan tribes subservient to a central authority with an extraordinary guile and through pressure and punitive

and enjoying the protection of American air cover they are now back in flying colours. They are holding the capital which they themselves would not have been able to occupy. How would they be looked upon at a national level where they would obviously demand a prominent role as only formal alternative to the Taliban? The Northern Alliance constituents could not manage a volatile Afghan society when they were in key

ance must not enter Kabul before a broadbased administration for the country is in place. The US also willily obliged Pakistan by endorsing the latter's view. Pakistan's concern was understandable. Inspite of her great role during the Afghan war of resistance against Soviet Union she found her position marginalised during Tajik-dominated Rabbani government. But in the meantime her stakes in had risen manifold. If was no more the question of a secured western front or strategic depth only. She now wanted to exploit the opportunity for an access to oil and gas resources of Central Asia via Afghanistan. When her effort to build up consensus among the Mujahideen leaders to ensure a reasonable Pushtun representation failed and as a result civil war continued she opted to back the Taliban for a stable internal order in Afghanistan so that she could share Central Asian bonanza. Although Pakistan persistently denied her Taliban connection at the height of Taliban fortune when they captured Kabul in 1996 by dislodging Rabbani government Pakistan was the first country to recognise it. Therefore Pakistan has a reason to be worried over the victory of Northern Alliance which was put up by the ousted government of Rabbani-Masood combine.

Indian nexus with Northern Alliance is particularly worrisome for Pakistan which will be further marginalised in Afghan affairs with a dispensation having Northern Alliance in leading role. Indian prime minister, it is learnt, came to an understanding with Russian President during the former's stopover in Moscow just before the fall of Kabul about the role of Northern Alliance in a future Afghan government. It is also learnt that it was Russia backed by India which promoted Northern Alliance to take control of Kabul against the wishes of the Americans so that an Indo-Russian axis can subsequently dominate the politics of the region. Many, on the contrary feel that the Alliance's entry into Kabul could not be possible without a green signal from Washington. If there is any truth in it, it is then an indication that the US-Pakistan honeymoon is about to be over?

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## PERSPECTIVES

It is also learnt that it was Russia backed by India which promoted Northern Alliance to take control of Kabul against the wishes of the Americans so that an Indo-Russian axis can subsequently dominate the politics of the region. Many, on the contrary feel that the Alliance's entry into Kabul could not be possible without a green signal from Washington. If there is any

the ground of Kabul before the defeated forces of former President Rabbani were catapulted there of course, with their tacit blessing. Bravery or no bravery, with the imminent overthrow of Taliban regime it has been a famous victory for the designers of the first war of the twenty-first century. And with that begins a crucial new phase in the conflict of Afghanistan.

In an ensuing scramble for spoils in post-Taliban Afghanistan the immediate problem is to fill in the prevailing power vacuum and even before that to decide on its structure. Understandably this will trigger a power struggle not just among the ethnic and sectarian groups within the country but also among the external powers and neighbours interested in wresting the control of this strategic corridor of the Hindu Kush. There might as well be the replay of the 'great game' among the new players on an extended turf.

But just now with the Taliban authority dislodged from Kabul and elsewhere there is neither an internal order nor a central authority in the country. Although the UN is brisly proceeding to put a transitional government in place, the country as viewed through the prism of history is once again back on the brink of chaos and anarchy.

In a society broken up into tribes, subtribes, clans and families each proud of its genealogy the Afghans admit inferiority to nobody and are strictly guided by their ethnic code of

actions where necessary to keep them in control. This worked wonderfully so long the measures did not campaign upon their tribal traditions and beliefs. The equation was a casualty of the Saur Revolution in 1978 and Soviet invasion a year later. The only other ruling equation the government headed by Tajik scholar Borhan Uddin Rabbani in 1992 witnessed the worst ever civil strife in the country paving the way for Taliban conquest in 1996. Thereafter the Taliban, constituted primarily of Pushtuns, adopted the repressive measures of Durranis rulers but missed their magic of crafting tribal consensus.

Now the UN as well as most other countries concerned with a post-Taliban dispensation are unanimous about a multiethnic broadbased government in Kabul. But just how can that be possible with Pushtun Taliban alienated from the process remains a riddle. The vast majority of Pushtuns baptised as taliban are condemned as abettor and perpetrator of terrorism and are, as of now, banished from the scene. Can this void be filled in by handful of Pushtuns the collaborators, the defectors and the 'Quislings'? On the other hand the 'Northern Alliance', the 'conqueror' of Kabul is only a disparate coalition of the minority ethnic groups. Badly battered in the battlefield they could retain only a toe hold in Afghanistan. Riding Russian armoured vehicle

positions in post-Najibullah administration. Can they do it now when the situation in Afghanistan has been rendered much more complex?

Yet the Northern Alliance is the favourite of the countries surrounding Afghanistan except Pakistan while the US, the key player of the game, is lukewarm over the question. The intriguing factor in the issue is that every country will attempt to safeguard its own interest in a future dispensation on Afghanistan whose interest will be accorded the least priority. In recent time Moscow had the most to fear from a growing Taliban influence in the region. The Taliban's physical presence along the border with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and an incipient Islamic militancy in these countries were constant source of unease for the Russians who, exasperated with their Chechen problem, heavily banked on Northern Alliance for providing a buffer between the Taliban and central Asian states. The Russians openly helped the alliance with financial and military assistance while the Taliban remained under economic and arms embargo imposed by the United Nations. The fall of Taliban and the Northern Alliances' conquest of Kabul must have come as a great relief to Moscow. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan must be equally relieved because they were the worst victims of Taliban-inspired militant Islam and had occasional

group in Sunni-dominated Afghanistan.

The Americans once promoted a measure of Islamic militancy among the Afghan Mujahideens to fight their Soviet foe and till very recently supported, in a subtle way, the Muslim insurgency against Russia with whom the US has serious clash of interest over central Asian resources. Only when the Taliban refused to hand over bin Laden after September 11 carnage there emerged a convergence of interest between the US and Russia over their common fight against terrorism. But the perceptions of their permanent interests remain as they were. Both will secure their strategic interests in the region. It is important for both to see who control Kabul, a vital link between resource rich Central Asia and potential market beyond the region. Once the September 11 will be adequately avenged and the US anger assuaged at the cost of hapless Afghans, the geo-strategic calculations of the big powers will assume their traditional line. So their permanent interests will have to be reflected in the forthcoming political dispensation.

In the cross-currents of the conflicting interests of the powers and neighbours the most precarious position is that of Pakistan only one country unhappy over Northern Alliance's advance to Kabul. Pakistan has been insisting from the beginning of the war that the Alli-

# South Asia's unsafe nukes: Apocalypse now?

PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

**A**nuclear spectre stalks South Asia. The danger is clear, present and growing. Numerous reports suggest that such a confrontation could involve Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and also Pakistan, India and the US.

There are reports that Osama bin Laden may have procured nuclear material through Pakistani scientists. Pakistan's generals fear their nuclear 'crown jewels' could be targeted (by Israel? India? US?). Most worrisome, says *The Sunday Times* (London), Pakistan may remove its nuclear weapons to China for 'safekeeping'. This can spark a hostile US reaction.

Not least, India-Pakistan hostility could escalate into a nuclear stand-off.

The consequences of the use of nuclear weapons would be horrific. Sober analysis based on the Cold War's 40-odd nuclear near-misses, and on the dynamic of today's hostilities suggests four nuclear-confrontation scenarios.

Common to all four is growing pro-Taliban discontent in Pakistan, destabilising the government, many of whose functionaries distrust the intimacy between Islamabad and Washington. Consider this:

**Scenario 1:** The Pakistan army, divided between pro-Musharraf and pro-Taliban officers, undergoes fission worse than the rifts that recently made Gen Musharraf reshuffle 10 of his top 17 command-

ers. The pro-Taliban group wins, seizing Pakistan's poorly safeguarded nuclear weapons and transferring them to Al-Qaeda which threatens the US and its 'stooges', Pakistan and India.

The US intervenes. As reported by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*, the US has created a special commando

disperse millions of microgrammes. Mass destruction ensues in either case.

**Scenario 2:** The US is frustrated at its failure to 'smoke out' Osama bin Laden despite intensified air and ground strikes.

American forces locate bin Laden's rough whereabouts - in a reinforced deep cave with supplies of electricity, water and food. (Af-

destructive potential as the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombs.

**Scenario 3:** Amidst heightened turmoil, Pakistan starts moving its nuclear arsenal to China because it doesn't trust the US. (Earlier, Mr Colin Powell had offered Pakistan high-tech codes to prevent unauthorised arming and firing of warheads. Pakistan refused this from fear that the CIA would bug its

spill across the border, where the Pakistani army is exercising.

An eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation ensues. India plans to 'decapitate' Pakistan. Islamabad threatens a nuclear first-strike. An Indian right-wing chorus clamours for 'the final solution': reoccupy 'Azad Kashmir' and 'settle' Kashmir once and for all.

The US tries to mediate but is

Both governments, addicted to nuclearism, want to minimise South Asia's unique nuclear danger... It just won't do to play down this grave danger. To reduce it, we must lower India-Pakistan hostility, resume the Agra process, and agree to nuclear restraint measures. These should include the separation of fissile material from detonators, and of bomb-configurations

unit, trained to detect, de-fang, disable or remove nuclear weapons even from relatively well-guarded facilities. The commandos are exercising with Israel's covert-operations Unit 262.

The unit fails to disable Pakistan's 20 to 60 nuclear weapons. Al-Qaeda sets off several nuclear explosions.

Alternatively, Al-Qaeda gets hold of kilos of plutonium-239, although no weapons. This is enough to kill hundreds of thousands if a crude bomb containing it is detonated over a city.

Even if it does not undergo a proper fission chain-reaction, the plutonium will scatter widely. A few microgrammes of inhaled or ingested plutonium-239 produces cancer. And the explosion will

ghanistan has scores of such caves.) But conventional bombs don't work.

Desperate for results before the winter peaks, the US uses 'tactical' nuclear weapons against the hide-outs. The bombing creates widespread havoc. It also sends a huge radioactive cloud towards Pakistan and India.

This violates norms of nuclear restraint and non-proliferation, encouraging nuclear-capable states to cross the threshold.

The scenario is not far-fetched. Mr Rumsfeld has repeatedly refused to rule out the use of nuclear weapons - as on October 29, on CNN. The US has recently developed earth-penetrating nuclear bombs by modifying regular W-61 warhead designs. These have the

facilities). The decision to remove nuclear bombs to China causes a revolt in the Pakistan army. Alarmed, Mr Bush tells Pakistan to stop. He is deeply suspicious of Beijing and aware of past Chinese nuclear assistance to Islamabad.

Pakistan balks. Reports of US preparations to 'neutralise' its nuclear weapons intensify the crisis. America makes menacing moves.

Pakistan opposes what it fears would be its arsenal's 'neutralisation'. Enraged, the US attacks Pakistan's nuclear facilities, causing a conflagration.

**Scenario 4:** Kashmiri militants, recently declared 'terrorist', unleash suicide attacks on Indian forces. New Delhi responds 'ruthlessly' with 'punitive' attacks, which

rebuffed. Pakistan makes a 'use-them-or-lose-them' choice and bombs Delhi/Mumbai. India retaliates, bombing Karachi/Lahore.

In an alternative scenario, Mr Fernandes apprehends chaos in Pakistan, and prevails upon Mr Vajpayee to order a pre-emptive nuclear strike on Pakistan.

The probability of these scenarios coming to pass is, of course, low. But it is finite, and much higher than before. In any event, 'low' doesn't mean much after September 11. The scenarios are no longer inconceivable.

The least they demand is an acknowledgment that nuclearisation has made millions of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Nepalis vulnerable to Armageddon. Those irresponsible 'experts'

## OPINION

# Boycott sweatshops?

AHMED TAZMEEN

**T**HE readymade garments industry in Bangladesh is now on the verge of a total collapse due to the duty and quota restrictions, the world-wide economic recession, and the escalation of the recession by the terrorist attacks on the US. At this critical juncture, a movement that is gaining ground in different parts of the world including the US may strike a severe blow to our struggling garments industry quite inadvertently. It is the movement against the so-called sweatshops - a movement that is geared more towards creating pressure on the companies, which are exploiting cheap labour of the third world, by boycotting their products. What I feel at this point is that the focus of this anti-sweatshop movement is somewhat blurred, though the intention of this movement is very humane. The activists who are rallying around this noble cause on the ground of ethics fail to take certain issues into consideration.

The very first question that needs to be addressed is how these sweatshops came into being. When the readymade garment industry in Bangladesh boomed in the early eighties, the only thing that worked as a prime catalyst in this boom was the abundance of cheap workers who would take up any job for their survival. The US (and many western) companies found it 'exorbitantly' profitable to operate from countries like Bangladesh. With support from their own governments and the local 'cooperating' governments, these big conglomerates went on to amassing profit from the sweat of the workers. The local counter-

parts of these companies got only a minor share of the gargantuan pie. If these companies, from the very beginning, were interested in paying wages commensurate with living expenses of the host countries, these sweatshops would have been non-existent today.

There is no denying the fact that, since the very early days of the boom, the garment factories in Bangladesh have been running as sweatshops; but surprisingly enough there has been no outcry so far. So, the second question we need to ask why the policymakers discuss the sweatshop issue so frequently now. In fact, violation of workers' rights has become a major issue in determining the fate of Bangladesh garment-exports to the US. The policymakers have been blind to the flagrant violation of human rights in Bangladesh from the very beginning, and suddenly they open their eyes and say that countries with sweatshops should suffer. No wonder, Bangladesh as a full-blown case, immediately fell under this injunction. This only means more hardship for the workers. I believe the motives behind such actions have to be severely questioned and criticised.

Given this dilemma, the third and the most important question we need to ask who are the people that would be suffering if the sweatshops are shut down. The answer is very obvious, but often we lose focus of this vital concern. The activists do talk about keeping businesses in countries like Bangladesh. They do talk about improving working conditions and environment for the workers, but what they do not emphasise enough is that the mother companies should be made 'legally' responsible to take the major

share of the tasks that the activists are demanding for. It is time for these companies to give back something to countries like Bangladesh only by cutting a tiny portion of their profit. At the same time, the companies have to keep their businesses running in these countries. Boycotting the products, what the activists are preaching, is not the solution. Such an attempt would be suicidal. This would only tantamount to killing thousands of workers. For countries like Bangladesh, it is difficult to change the life of the workers overnight.

There are many social, cultural and political factors involved. Because of the pace at which the global share of exports is being consumed by many other favoured nations, it is now next to impossible for Bangladesh to find the time to make things better for the workers. And herein lies the importance of the support and the good intentions of the government and the companies, both local and foreign. If there is any faltering from these good intentions and support, people should be brave enough to vehemently protest. Activists around the world should unite around the single goal of putting pressure first on the companies and then on their local counterparts to make things better for the workers without closing down the sweatshops. Because these shops provide the daily bread to millions.

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# Gas for export

SHUJA ALIM

**B**ANGLADESH has very few natural resources of which gas is a major one. Unfortunately Bangladesh has not been able to utilize properly this natural resource for the last so many years mainly because of financial constraints and lack of planning and effort.

So many years have passed but we have not been able to supply gas for domestic use to most of our cities, towns, villages beyond Dhaka.

A lot of foreign companies, mainly the American ones, have been given contract to explore and extract gas without proper planning for its use/utilisation. There seems to be no justified reason to give contract to so many gas exploration companies at the same time without proper planning.

For the last few years we have been hearing talks of selling gas to India through pipe line as the quantity of gas extracted does not have full utilisation in our country and the companies involved are making a lot of noises, as they have already invested a lot of money and are not seeing the prospect of getting return of their investment in the near future and they are insisting that the Government of Bangladesh should allow the sale of gas "through pipe line" to India. These (mostly) American companies insist that Bangladesh has sufficient gas for the next 30 years or more and sufficient quantity for export with bright prospect for discovery of further gas reserves.

There has been a lot of controversy regarding the available gas reserve and the sale of same to India through pipe line.

Since Bangladesh has not agreed to comply with the American bidding a lot of economic pressures are being put on the government to agree to the proposal of gas export.

As I myself or any other citizen of Bangladesh would feel that although export/sale of gas should be given a very serious thought but at the same time supply of gas through pipe line should never be considered mainly for one reason: As everyone in Bangladesh knows, we have something called 'system loss' in PDB and this system loss has often been as much as almost 50 per cent. Who can guarantee that we would not have a similar or a higher system loss if we allow supply of gas through pipe line?

As I said Bangladesh should give a very serious thought to the sale/export of gas but only after meeting all our domestic requirements such as domestic use, conversion of our factories and power plants to the use of gas instead of other fuel, and converting our transport system from petrol/diesel to CNG. And after all these have been done, if the gas companies think Bangladesh still has gas for export, which of course I believe they do, then let them invest in building a liquefied gas plant and let us export gas in liquefied form to India and other countries which would be a fair deal for everyone. Moreover as we understand there is no scope/provision for export of gas through pipe line in the PSCS signed with the companies, hence one should not waste time on such proposals which may be detrimental to the people and state of Bangladesh.

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