

Uncertainty as Awami League decides to quit the parliament

Both parties more keen about hostility than debate

THE country seems to be hurrying towards a major crisis within a scant few months after the national polls were held. The Opposition Awami League has declared that its MPs will resign en masse from the present parliament. They have said that the atmosphere is not conducive to the conducting of parliamentary business and the situation in general not positive for any local polls or participation in the business of legislating. This is serious news and means that a new wave of uncertainty may sweep the land already reeling under what may be one of the worst law and order situations we have faced till date.

Awami League has made certain complaints about being victimized both as individuals and as a party. We have noted the series of arrests where AL activists were hauled in. The arrest and alleged torture of Bahauddin Nasim has caused concern in many quarters. The revival of the 19-year old case against Sheikh Hasina is just not going to be passed off as natural judicial action. These have certainly tensed the political atmosphere up.

But the crunch was of course the introduction of the Bill to remove the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It's difficult to understand why the BNP thought this Bill to be a national priority and introduced it knowing fully well that it would cause a great deal of acrimony in an environment already overloaded with hostility. The BNP obviously has fallen short of all that was needed to be done to generate calm in the political ambience. The consequences have been inevitable.

But Awami League's role hasn't been positive in any sense of the term either. Since its refusal to accept the electoral verdict partisan concerns rather than political merit of issues have got the better of their best judgement. The fact that it never joined the parliament months after the results were declared is a sign of the premium it puts on public exercise of political rights. Finally, the major public issues plaguing Bangladesh which needs to be raised in the House seemingly hold very little appeal for the Awami League.

All the issues that form the core of the battle between the two parties could well have been discussed in the parliament. But the manner in which they have conducted themselves and the way the parliament has been diminished by both the parties in the last decade show that our politics may not have graduated as yet from the streets to the House. That's why as the parliament lies unused and the street looks filled with the energy of destruction.

Field-day for exam cheats

Still labouring at the wrong end of the stick

MORE than 4,000 examinees were expelled on the first day. At least 22 teachers were also relieved of invigilation duty for playing the abettor. This year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations have indeed had a predictable start last Thursday with reports of mass cheating and sporadic violence from across the country hitting front pages of the leading news dailies. Also predictable was the failure of the government's much-hyped special efforts to keep the cheats and their abettors at bay. No one had expected it to succeed, though; for, everyone knows that any piecemeal measure will not and cannot effectively eliminate the scourge of mass cheating in public examinations. What is needed at this juncture is a systemic overhaul, towards which, unfortunately, not much thought has been spared as yet. Expulsion of at least 22 teachers for having encouraged cheating is a poignant pointer to the mess our education system has been caught in. These teachers have doubly defaulted in their prime duty. They have not only failed to prepare the students for the examinations with proper coaching but also tried to cover it up by helping the examinees cross the SSC hurdle through foul means. Such a mental makeup points to our flawed attitude to education itself.

Certificates carry more weight than competence in society these days. And some teachers seem to have given in to this growing social demand. They pay more attention to private tuition than classroom teaching. And the compulsion is to make sure that the students pass the examinations, anyway, anyhow. The disgraced 22 may have given in to such desperation.

Unless we strike at the roots, the rot will continue. The policymakers should address the issue of cheating in public examinations as a systemic failure. It is time to rethink and revise our education strategy; for, the cheats and their abettors are by-products of a flawed system. When the system is rectified, they would just fall by the wayside.

SHAH A M S KIBRIA

I am saddened rather than angered by the attempt on the part of the BNP-Jamaat government to downplay the role of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and blow out of proportion the role played by Gen Ziaur Rahman in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The thoughtful among them know it well that their attempt re-write history is doomed to fail. Regardless of what they say in public meetings and write in school textbooks. Sheikh Mujib's name will remain synonymous with that to Bangladesh and he will remain for ever the symbol of the nation's freedom.

But I am saddened because the controversy tends to confuse the present generation about the authentic history of the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign country. The Bengalis of this deltaic region won their freedom after a long and hard struggle. It is a checkered history of foreign conquest, exploitation and sporadic local resistance. Over the centuries many individuals and communities have played significant roles in the process of our emancipation and it is important to record these contributions in the historical context in which these events unfolded. Major Zia's radio broadcast of March 27, 1971 certainly had an importance in the context of the rapidly changing sequence of events in the days before and after making the radio broadcast, joined the Liberation War under the overall command of the Mujibnagar government and as a sector commander, carried out his duties till victory was achieved on December 16, 1971. Thereafter, he joined his duties as a regular officer within the hierarchy of the Bangladesh Army.

Did he claim, at any time between 27 March to 16 December 1971 that it was he who proclaimed the independence of the country? As a matter of fact, did he have any legal or moral or political right to speak on behalf of the whole nation? The answer is an emphatic no. Did he question or challenge the authority of the Mujibnagar government? No. In fact, he is on record as having written in an article that he read out on the radio the proclamation of independence on 27 March, on behalf of the nation's "undisputed leader" Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. All this is part of history and anything written to the contrary is patently false. Lies or fabricated and concocted stories can rarely replace genuine history. Those who are trying to elevate Gen. Zia to new heights are making him a controversial figure. Left alone, the nation will eventually acknowledge his contribution to the Liberation War in its proper perspective. Besides, he will also be judged by history for his stewardship of the country during the period November 1975 to April 1981.

Sheikh Mujib's role in our emancipation is, however, not confined either to the declaration of independence period. His role is

broader and deeper. He was the leader who rallied the nation with vision and rock-hard determination and led them towards the final goal of independence. The seeds were sown in the first Language Movement of March 11, 1948 when the voice of protest against the imposition of Urdu was first raised and Sheikh Mujib was at the forefront in this act of defiance of the Pakistani authorities.

The Language Movement of 1952 was the culmination of the process of re-thinking among the Bengali intellectuals and the educated middle class that started in 1948. Initially a movement for ensuring an equal status for Bangla and Urdu as the state languages of Pakistan, but the firing and bloodshed turned it into a revolt against the subordinate status accorded to the Bengalis, despite being the majority in Pakistan. Thus February 21, 1952 marked the re-awakening of the people from the confusion about their true identity. In fact, the

leader at the right time. But there are also other examples of special situations that were created by charismatic leaders by their vision and will power and by their ability to feel the pulse of the people. Such leaders can give expression to the innermost desires and aspirations of his people. In the case of Bangladesh the two trends seemed to converge. When the Bengali Muslims, being disillusioned about a state based entirely on religious ties, were searching for a new goal for their political and economic emancipation, Sheikh Mujib came forward to prepare the ground and moved step by step with the astuteness of a statesman.

When the time was ripe he set the final goal. It is at this point that Mujib parted company with the other three titans of our times, Sher-e-Bangla, Suhrawardy and Bhashani. These three outstanding leaders dominated the political stage of Bengal for more than half a century. At different times, during

Bangladesh. This is his greatest achievement.

Of course, such identification of a leader with the nation's aspirations was not the outcome of just feelings or sentiments; it was based on a series of major policy initiatives. The initiative to introduce non-communal and secular politics in Bangladesh was the first basic step. At the initiative of Sheikh Mujib the name of the party was changed in 1955 from Awami Muslim League to Awami League. Here was one bold stroke that laid the secular foundation for the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians could all join the national platform that Awami League provided in 1971. The changeover to joint electorate was a logical corollary. The change in the party's name was the symbolic shift from narrow, communal politics to broad-based and nationalist political goal.

Sheikh Mujib's defiance of

It was not just the urban educated classes but the broad masses of the people who had transferred their loyalty from Pakistan to emerging Bangladesh of which Sheikh Mujib was both the symbol and the leader. Sheikh Mujib's historic speech in the Race course Maidan on March 7 was more than a mere speech by a leader; it was as if the whole nation had found voice in this man who stood there on the dais on that day.

blood that was spilled on that fateful day that seemed to break the spell of Pakistan with a jolt.

The landslide victory of the United Front in the 1954 provincial elections proved beyond any doubt that the masses of Bangladesh had rejected the communal and religion-based politics of the Muslim League that led to the partition of India. But the journey from 1952 to 1971 was not easy or smooth. A lot of spadework was needed to direct popular discontent towards the final goal.

It was Sheikh Mujib who guided the nation during these twenty critical years. Under his inspiring and bold leadership the Bengali shed the self-doubt and uncertainties about national identity and embarked on the final struggle to cast off the shackles. Indeed the nation had awaited a leader of his caliber for a thousand years who would lead them in the final charge to achieve independence and international recognition. Sheikh Mujib was thus the answer to the nation's prayers for a leader. He was the man of destiny. At the right moment of our history he appeared on the scene with his dream for a "Sonar Bangla". Those who make derogatory remarks about Bangabandhu in the belief that such remarks will somehow tarnish his image are sadly mistaken. The towering figure of Sheikh Mujib will remain on his high pedestal despite misguided partisan attempt by his detractors. They may create temporary confusion but there must not be any doubt that history's unforgiving hand will eventually clear away these cobwebs and smokescreens.

History is replete with instances of situations that threw up the right

the first half of the 20th century they led Bengali Muslims. Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq was a colossus whose forceful personality was compared by the admiring people with that of a royal Bengal tiger. He saved the down trodden Muslim peasantry by a bold initiative to establish the Debt Reconciliation Boards to mitigate the crushing burden of indebtedness of the poor Muslim peasants. His strong support for Muslim education was also a contributing factor in the renaissance of the Bengali Muslims. Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy was a man of great learning and political sagacity and skill but he failed to move in time and his initiative in 1946 for an independent united Bengal ended in failure. He was the political mentor of Sheikh Mujib but it is interesting to note that though the latter revered Suhrawardy as his mentor, he followed his own political instincts without any direct or discernible influence from Suhrawardy. A great orator, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani could easily sway large crowds and establish easy rapport with the common people. His populist views, often tending to veer left, made him a popular leader who could effectively agitate for popular causes. But he failed to hold a clearly defined goal before the people that coincided with the people's aspirations. Sheikh Mujib not only articulated the aspirations of the whole nation, he became the symbol of the Bengali desire for emancipation and freedom. His dream for the future of Bangladesh and the nation's dream became one and the same. This, I believe, is what marks him out as the architect of independent and sovereign

EBDO was another major factor in singling him out among Bengali leaders who had the courage to stand up to the West Pakistani bullies. General Ayub Khan had promulgated this ordinance with a view to removing from the political arena all the veteran politicians who dominated the scene and who could contest him for power. He wanted to clear the deck for ensuring undisturbed and undisputed power for himself. Virtually all the leaders including such stalwarts as Nurul Amin, Aaur Rahman Khan, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Advocate A Salam Khan and many others opted to get out of active politics for fear of prosecution and persecution under the repressive EBDO. Sheikh Mujib's decision to refuse to bow down under EBDO was recognized by the Bengali masses as an act of great courage. He rose very rapidly in public esteem while others receded to the background.

The most significant initiative taken by Sheikh Mujib was the articulation in a concrete form the Bengali aspiration for self-determination in the six-point charter of demands. Until 1966 Bengali discontent was either too narrowly focused on one or two issues or too disjointed and diffused. Bengali leaders of every political hue talked about the common and populist theme of injustices being done to the people of east Pakistan but no one, except Sheikh Mujib, had a clear, concrete and positive plan of action to remedy the situation. Sheikh Mujib's six points were both specific and comprehensive and even ordinary people in Bangladesh could easily understand the meaning. West Pakistani leaders also understood the significance.

They knew that the days of bluffing the Bengalis were over and that the moment of truth had arrived. Ayub's sharp and harsh reaction was due to his realization that unless nipped in the bud, the six-point formula reaction was due to his realization that unless nipped in the bud, the six-point formula will inevitably put an end to the political domination and economic exploitation of Bangladesh. Predictably, the repression unleashed by him was savage. But for the Bengalis the six-point formula was like an elixir. Instead of dissipating their energies in a host of isolated and minor issues, the nation had found a worthwhile goal to strive for and aim at. In fact, the mobilization of the nation for the ultimate battle had started and Mujib had already emerged as the leader of the struggle.

In a curious twist of history, it was the West Pakistani ruling clique that made Sheikh Mujib a legend in his lifetime. The Agartala conspiracy case acted as a catalyst for the

of an independent Bangladesh. They thought, erroneously no doubt, that because of the support provided by India that was allied to the Soviet Union, the new state would be a satellite of the Soviet Union. However, despite these reservations, they could not deny or ignore the democratic mandate secured by Mujib in a free and fair election.

The Liberation War of Bangladesh, unlike some of the other such wars, was fought strictly on the basis of a declaration by a leader who had the legal mandate from the people to speak on their behalf. When the Pakistani dictator Yahya Khan wanted to execute Mujib in his prison, there was a chorus of protests and appeals even from those world leaders who did not support the Bengali demand for independence.

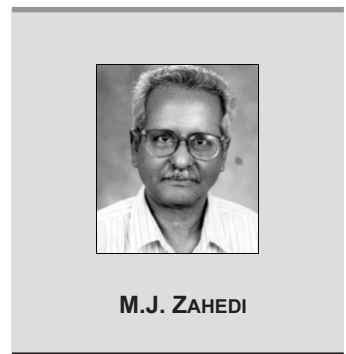
The Western powers, despite their reservations, could not deny his status as the elected leader of the people of Bangladesh. As one who lived in the United States during the crucial nine months, I can say that our greatest asset in the campaign for mobilizing popular support in favour of Bangladesh was the democratic nature of our struggle and the legal mandate that Sheikh Mujib had for the declaration of independence. Those who claim that Gen. Zia declared the independence, forgot the fundamental issue of competence to make such a declaration. Could any one, even a major in the army, make such a declaration out of the blue? Major Zia made the radio broadcast on behalf of the "undisputed leader" of the nation, Sheikh Mujib, who had officially received mandate from the people in an election to lead them at this crucial hour.

The "undisputed" leaders' leadership was tested during the non-cooperation movement launched by him in the first week of March, 1971. Was there any one in the country in those fateful days who could oppose or question the directives issued by Sheikh Mujib? His orders had acquired the authority of the law of the land. It was an extraordinary, almost unique, situation. It was not just the urban educated classes but the broad masses of the people who had transferred their loyalty from Pakistan to emerging Bangladesh of which Sheikh Mujib was both the symbol and the leader. Sheikh Mujib's historic speech in the Race course Maidan on March 7 was more than a mere speech by a leader; it was as if the whole nation had found voice in this man who stood there on the dais on that day. Generation after generation, the Bengalis will recall every word of that speech that embodied their finest sentiments, their vision and determination and their courage and willingness to make sacrifices for independence.

The resounding victory of Awami League in the general elections of 1970 not only raised Sheikh Mujib to new heights of power and responsibility, it also formalized its position as the undisputed leader of the nation. It gave him the mandate to negotiate but more importantly, it placed him in the unique position to proclaim the independence of the country. In retrospect, we all know from contemporary history that some western powers, notably the United States, did not like the birth

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ME peace ahead?



M. J. ZAHEDI

THE Pakistani media last week gave very good coverage to the Saudi plan for peace in Middle East. It deserved wide coverage too: it was a rare proactive initiative by Saudi Arabia on the longstanding and continuing problem that is hindering the establishment of peace in the region.

The Saudi plan puts recognition of Israel by the Arab world alongside a total Israeli withdrawal. A further development has been the subsequent call by King Fahad for a Palestinian state with Al Quds as its capital. Writing in daily The Nation, the former Pakistan information minister Mushahid Hussain said that the Saudi initiative has put Israel on the defensive. It has also encouraged a cleavage in European and American positions on Palestine. In effect, Mushahid said, Saudi Arabia has

LETTER FROM KARACHI
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conveyed that it is willing to mobilise Arab and Muslim opinion away from the past notions, which refused even to recognize the existence of Israel. Of course, in return Israel has to fully withdraw from all occupied territories and accept an independent Palestinian territory, a concept the USA too has now accepted, though for the first time.

Earlier peace plans as well as accords have tended to leave the issue of Jerusalem ambivalent, given that Israel claims it as its heavenly capital. The Saudi plan calls for not only a total withdrawal of Israel from all Arab lands but also for the return of Jerusalem to the Palestinians. All this, for recognition from the Arab world and, therefore, lasting peace in the region. No one so far has rejected the Saudi plan outright. It will be discussed at the Arab League summit scheduled for March 26-27, in Beirut.

The Saudi proposal is important on many counts. It links peace through recognition of Israel with the return of all Israel-occupied Arab lands. The original land for peace

formula has been further bolstered by the commitment of recognition by the Arab world as a collectivity, of course assuming that the plan gets the approval of the Arab League summit.

Although there have been many peace plans before, the timing of the Saudi plan is significant, rather critical. Israelis have begun to realise that violence will not end the conflict. Therefore peace is not possible within the Sharon policy of Palestinian-killing. Moreover, now from within Israel itself there is an increasing protest over Sharon's policy. Israeli reservists are refusing to serve in the army as it conducts killings of Palestinians. So a plan coming from within the Arab world itself should be a major incentive and base for peace negotiations once again.

The plan sees peace within an all-compassing framework that requires the return of all Arab lands occupied through military aggression by Israel. There has to be a return, not just of Palestinian territories but also the Golan Heights to

Syria in return for therecognition of Israel and the ensuing peace.

The plan is important because it emanates from Saudi Arabia, a state that usually adopts a low-key stance on foreign policy issues. The present plan comes at a time when Saudi Arabia is finding its strategic partnership with the USA increasingly uncomfortable. 'Could this signal a new, more proactive, role by Saudi Arabia on issues concerning the Arab world in particular and the Muslim world in general', asks a writer of an article on the Saudi plan in The News. Pakistan has welcomed the Saudi plan. But it is important for Pakistan to know what the Arab League line would be before it can move towards getting a collective policy formulated within the OIC on Israel.

The issue of recognising Israel must be dealt within the collectivity of key Muslim players in the Middle East. These players, along with Pakistan, must act in agreement so that the US-Israeli policy of isolating each Muslim state does not succeed. In an article in daily The

Nation, Mushahid Husain said that Pakistan should not take any proactive steps that would weaken its position on Kashmir. And that would be the case were Pakistan to recognize Israel while it rejects UN resolutions and remains in occupation of territory conquered by force. It would be a bad precedent given India's occupation of Kashmir.

Why is the recognition issue so critical? Because recognition does not imply only friendly relations, it does imply recognising the existence of a reality, of course at a time the countries consider convenient and in accordance with their policies. That is why Pakistan recognised South Africa only after the end of apartheid. The same way, Pakistan cannot recognise Zionist Israel as long as it represents the results of military conquest and aggression. To do otherwise would undermine Pakistan's stand on Kashmir and would provide India legitimacy for its occupation of Kashmir.

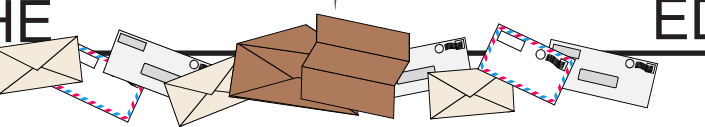
The Saudi plan insists on implementation of UN resolutions on

Palestine. It is important since it seeks an honourable compromise, based on full Israeli reciprocity, withdrawal and recognition of Palestinian rights, not a unilateral rights, not a unilateral surrender to 'new realities'.

It is in this context therefore the Saudi peace plan will be built upon, especially on the recognition of Israel issue. Israel's genocidal plans cannot be allowed to succeed. It knows that it cannot have peace in the region unless its existence is recognized. The disunity among the states in the area has allowed Israeli attitude to reach an audacious level and has allowed the USA to ride roughshod over its Arab allies. Unless the Arab League and the OIC changes decades of timidity, we may as well accept the end of Palestinian and Kashmiri people, the writer said. It appears that for the Arabs, of all the compromises suggested on various aspects of the Middle East conflict, compromises on Jerusalem are least acceptable. The reiteration of Saudi Arabia that Al Quds is the capital of the Palestinian state reflects this position.

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



ZIA and services within

On 25th February 2002 at 2230/35 hrs, I was around the north most passenger entry gate at the outgoing Intl. Terminal, Zia International Airport.

I was rather surprised to observe the following incident. An old man was requesting the gatekeeper to allow him inside to assist his wife to lift baggage on the Belt, as the lady was seemingly unable to lift the baggage. At this, the gatekeeper called his supervisor who started shouting at the old man without even hearing him as to why he wanted to go inside.

Any staff/official deputed to work in the front line i.e. Passengers Area must be a well-behaved person knowing demeanour and etiquette. Such a misbehaving character should not be in the front line or

show-window-- he could be somewhere behind. Why there was no assistance available for such elderly passengers?

The employees on duty may be strict and tough but they must behave. They must keep in mind that they are public servants and not Public Masters.

Ghaziur Dhaka

Corruption in China

Recent studies have found that China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria and Indonesia are among the most corrupt countries in the world, with China leading the hit parade. An investigative report in The Washington Post on corruption in the city of Shenyang shows what is wrong with a fast-growing developing country like China. This has implications for other developing countries trying to become indus-

trialised like China.

The report showed that when anti-corruption investigators searched two country houses belonging to Shenyang's mayor, they found \$6 million worth of gold



Fixing economy?

bars hidden in the walls, 150 Rolex watches and antiques. The gold

and Rolexes were genuine, but Chinese sources said the antiques turned out to be bogus, proving that in China even crooks get ripped off.

The corruption that runs this fast-growing city is symptomatic of what is going on in the whole country. Prime Minister Zhu Rongji underscored the extent of the problem on March 5 in a report to the National People's Congress in Beijing. "Festivals and ceremonies of every conceivable description are celebrated," Zhu said, "during which the hosts vie with one another for lavishness. Officials use public funds for winning and dining, extravagant entertainment and private travel abroad." Hu Gangang, a Chinese economist, estimates that, in dollar value, China is the most corrupt country in the world.

Corruption in Shenyang involved almost every government department and ran the gamut, including

smuggling, buying and selling official positions, stealing farmlands for big development projects, and rigging construction contracts. The mayor, his wife, the police, prosecutors, judges, custom officers and local legislators were all on the take, according to a government report.

Mayor Mu Suixin was a dynamic leader, so Shenyang succeeded in ripping off the public property on a massive scale. When the city hired a Hong Kong construction company to build a highway, Mu's wife sold questionable construction material to the project, Chinese sources said. Six months after the project was completed, the road was riddled with potholes. Now under arrest, another high official, Liu Yong was a legislator in the local People's Congress. But he actually headed a local crime organisation. He also liked to gamble. A month before his arrest, Liu was in Las Vegas, sources said. Liu

is now awaiting trial. Some of the members of the Chinese Communist Party and leading lights in the city were also implicated. "This wasn't the party versus the mob," said a Western resident of Shenyang. "The party was the mob."

Prime Minister Zhu offered a few new ideas as how to combat corruption. He proposed a code of conduct and expressed a wish for "moral standards based on honesty and moral integrity." But wishes alone cannot bring any result.

Corruption on such a gargantuan scale in the world's most populous country is a worrisome phenomenon. This explains why other most populous countries are closely behind China in corruption on a mass scale. It would be instructive for all these countries to watch how China tackles its greatest crisis in the coming years.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Negative politics

Bangladesh is passing through a phase of negative politics, based on past charisma. It appears that this state will continue so long both the Begums wield political influence.

When one party comes to power, it starts what it calls the political neutralisation process. What we witness is the politics of consolidation, not the expected national thrust towards higher stages of development of the masses.

The Awami League's style of thinking and working has not changed, whether it is in or out of power. The negative approach is so entrenched in the minds of the seniors that the juniors (future leaders) do not have the scope to learn to apply options to problems. Such a leader is a liability to the society, and the handling of these

liability results in systems loss at the social levels.

Our politicians never forget two weaknesses: (a) that they are politicians (cannot hide their avocation even on social occasions); and, (b) that they belong to a particular political party (cannot hide their identity while travelling incognito).

The nation is being led by two leaders who propped up suddenly on the throne without notice and mental preparation. This liability is still dogging the nation even after 25 years. They are held hostage within the party, and the party holds the nation hostage. The weakness of the people is that they are not accustomed to change of the right type of leadership. Past changes were not in the right direction, looking as a democrat.

AH Dhaka