

## Violence at DU

Right of dissent the biggest casualty

THE nation was witness to the most disgraceful behaviour by the student wing of the BNP, the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) who, in a most blatant act of muscle flexing and without minimum regard for others' right of dissent, descended upon a gathering of another section of students holding a meeting of their own, and inflicted severe injuries on many of them.

Are we to accept that political rivals have no right to express their views? That the right of dissent is something that does not apply to us? Is the right to demonstrate and ventilate our feelings in a peaceful manner in Bangladesh is becoming a thing of the past?

The student wing of the ruling party went completely berserk and attacked even the female students, something that was never seen in the past. Undemocratic and atrocious behaviour from the supposedly more enlightened lot, seems to suggest that democracy in our country has degenerated to the lowest level.

We condemn this behaviour, because it is against all democratic norms as well as against norms of civilized conduct.

The statements of the JCD president that it was never 'silent' at moments of national 'crises' gives one the impression that the JCD was raring for a confrontation and was fully prepared for what followed.

We cannot also rationalise either the attack by the same unruly students on the office of the DUTA president, which had nothing to do with the opposition students' rally. This, we feel, is an attempt to intimidate individuals and organisations that do not share JCD views.

We recall the remarks of the PM that government tolerance should not be construed as weakness. We wonder if what was exhibited by the student wing of her party is a sign of tolerance and restraint?

We also condemn the reaction of the opposition student groups that resulted in damage to several private and public transports. Their violence was totally unwarranted.

The JCD behaviour is most regrettable, particularly when the critical period that we are passing through demands restraint and sanity in our behaviour and utterances.

We demand of the government to not only rein in its student front but also take all those responsible for Saturday's incidents to task.

## Rights of indigenous people

It's time we recognised their

role in society

INDIGENOUS people protest at quota violation' -- this was the headline of a small news item in The Daily Star last Sunday. The story was about hundreds of indigenous people of Bandarban hill district holding a protest demonstration against government's violation of quota system for them in appointing primary school teachers. This was just another glaring example of growing disillusionment among the indigenous people over their rights, both fundamental and constitutional, being violated in every sphere of life.

The group that was holding the demonstration in Bandarban demanded cancellation of the appointments to 103 posts of assistant teachers where only 15 indigenous candidates were finalised. It, in their eyes, is gross violation of Hill District Local Government Act 1989 and most importantly the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord signed in 1997 between the then Awami League government and PCJSS, the representative body of the indigenous community. If what they are saying is right, then such discrimination and deprivation can only lead to an atmosphere where suspicion and anger will further distance them from the mainstream. That must be avoided.

In fact the dissatisfaction over the slow, at times even non-implementation of the treaty, prompted the community leaders to vent their anger in public. Neglecting them or their rights in the society as common citizens only fuelled the mistrust and suspicion between them and the majority Bangalees. Concerns were also expressed by various rights and humanitarian groups many a time in the past about the consequences of such deprivation faced by the indigenous community. It is high time the authorities took up the issue more seriously than before and instead of ignoring them, recognised the indigenous community as a part of our society. They feel isolated even after so many years of independence.

# Afghanistan revisited



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE sheer curiosity takes one to the country once brutalised by the Taliban and now under the threat of their resurgence. The United States waged one of the history's most unequal wars to crush those intrepid soldiers of the God who apparently melted into disappearance before the intense air attacks launched by the Americans. Now three years after the relentless bombings of the coalition forces halted, the curiosity still abounds about the fate of the Taliban who were accused of sheltering Osama bin Laden, the Saudi terrorist and thus harbouring international terrorism. Obviously they were the target of the first fury of American wrath after the Twin Tower tragedy and could hardly withstand the onslaught. Yet a spate of media news point to their existence in hibernation. It appears the Taliban

were down but not out. There are curiosities also about the country's state of peace and stability. Could order be restored in strife-torn Afghanistan and subsistence ensured for its hapless people after decades of drought, famine and war? Or the country slid further backward to be in perpetual lurch amidst continuing disorder? As the sharp swift war on terror against Afghanistan came to a close, Tony Blair said in November,

administration. They have drafted a constitution and are preparing to hold a democratic presidential and parliamentary election. The western powers making mealy mouthed promises did not however fulfil their commitment. Disorder and violence still stalk the land -- particularly in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. More than 800 people have been killed in past year in a wave of violence unleashed by the remnants of

under the command of regional warlords is the key to Afghanistan's stability. President Hamid Karzai told the *New York Times* that Afghanistan's private militia was a greater threat to the country than the Islamic militants of Taliban variety. According to him only 10,000 of estimated 50,000 militias could be demobilised after the Taliban's fall and that's why the parliamentary election had to be postponed till April.

report. The task of providing basic internal security has been given to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) comprising troops provided by NATO powers. But their number is totally inadequate. They have a total strength of 6,500 men and they are mainly based in Kabul. In consequence, the Afghan capital is safe but not the rest of the country. Warlords and drug barons rule most of the

garrisons known as Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) throughout northern and western Afghanistan on the eve of the election. American-led coalition forces will perform policing in the more volatile South and East Afghanistan. In the meantime NATO is divided on the issue of more troops for Afghanistan. It's an indication that President Karzai is being asked to fend for itself -- something he is not capable of.

Most of the NATO members are dragging their feet and avoiding dispatch of more troops. To make things worse for Karzai the Taliban are bent upon disrupting the election process. Any delay in holding presidential and parliamentary election would mark victory for them. There is also popular apprehension that the Americans might at some point cut their losses and seek an exist strategy. The Taliban estimate -- and rightly -- that time is in their favour. Given the situation unfolding, peace and stability still remains elusive in Afghanistan and the evolving realities are just part of never ending cycle of violence in Afghanistan. The American euphoria of establishing slow over the strategic corridor of Hindukush mountains may prove premature as their scripted plans in their global war on terror seem to be going haywire.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

## PERSPECTIVES

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2001 that in rebuilding their country, the people of Afghanistan would receive full support of the coalition. "We must give you all help and support that you need" he said "and that support will be forthcoming." But in the maze of international politics Afghanistan remains today largely a forgotten country.

However, the Afghans have done their bit in setting up an interim government and holding a Loya Jirga or grand council to set up a legitimate

Taliban. They have vowed to disrupt October election and carried out a string of attacks killing civilians, government employees and election workers. Recently there was an explosion in the city of Herat killing five people and wounding 34. The governor of Herat, Ismail Khan is a warlord and has his own militia men.

Efforts of the central government to disarm rogue private army have not so far been successful. Disarming of thousands of irregular fighters

It is true that there are about 20,000 coalition troops, mostly Americans, in Afghanistan but they are mainly to hunt down Osama bin Laden and other remnants of al-Qaida. American forces, during their operations, are also resorting to search and destruction mission and revenge killing further alienating the civilian population. Violation of human rights by the American troops has been documented and indicted by the Human Rights Watch in its

country and any one who opposes them is threatened with death.

NATO's European peacekeepers promised to restore peace in the country ahead of election but have so far singularly failed to do so. Terrorist violence sweeps the land. A number of workers of different aid agencies as well as election workers have been killed resulting in delay in holding the election. That precisely fulfils the plans of the Taliban. ISAF has recently decided to post regional

# Rationalising the Cabinet

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

IN the first week of this month, the newspapers reported that on September 4 both the ruling and opposition lawmakers of the Parliamentary Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions decided to table a bill in the House brought by a Jatiya Party lawmaker proposing amendment to the Constitution for a reduced size of the Cabinet. The bill reportedly proposes that the number of Ministers, Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers shall not exceed one-tenth of total number of members of Parliament, and not less than nine-tenths of their number shall be appointed from among members of Parliament, and not more than one-tenth of their number may be chosen from among persons qualified for election as members of Parliament.

According to the Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act, 2004: "There shall be reserved forty five seats exclusively for women members and they will be elected by the members of the Parliament in accordance with law on the basis of procedure of proportional representation in the Parliament through single transferable vote."

So, the total number of seats of members of Parliament including the three hundred members referred to in Article 65 (2) stand at 345. One-tenth of 345 comes to 35. Article 55 (1) of the Constitution provides that there shall be a Cabinet for Bangladesh

having the Prime Minister at its head and comprising also such other Ministers as the Prime Minister may from time to time designate. According to Article 58 (5), "Minister" includes Minister of State and Deputy Minister. This means that according to the proposed amendment, the total number of Ministers, Ministers of State, and Deputy Ministers will not exceed 35. At present there are 50 Ministers, Ministers of State, and Deputy Ministers. The statement regarding objects and reasons of the proposed bill has reportedly said that

Private members' bill differs from government bill in the sense that a Minister moves a government bill whereas private members' bill is moved by a member other than a Minister. It may be mentioned that according to Rules of Procedure of Parliament of Bangladesh, the functions of the Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions,

ules 55 and 56 of the Constitution in view of the fact that these Articles have neither limited the size of the Cabinet nor fixed the total number of ministers to be appointed.

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tary committee for its decision to introduce a constitutional amendment in the House to permanently fix the size of the Cabinet, and expressed hope that the Prime Minister would give serious thought to the matter. The editorial concluded with the hope that "good sense will prevail upon the government and the issue will be discussed thoroughly both inside and outside the House."

The *New Nation's* editorial of September 6 says: "The parliamentary standing committee on Private

resource is left in the budget."

In exercise of the powers given by the Constitution, the President makes rules for allocation and transaction of business of the government. These rules are called Rules of Business. Rules of Business, 1975, amended from time to time, were finally replaced by Rules of Business, 1996, during the period of the immediate past AL government. These Rules of Business provide that: "Where there is a Minister of State/Deputy Minister, the Prime Minister or the Minister-in-charge

relationship between the Minister-in-charge of a ministry and the Minister of State/Deputy Minister there has hardly been cordial. The press has reported many such incidents in the past. There was even an instance when a Minister of State did not attend his office in the ministry for months for not allocating any official work to him. The proposed bill, if passed, is expected to solve all such problems to a considerable extent.

A big Cabinet is not a *sine qua non* for running the government efficiently. In many countries including Bangladesh, a large Cabinet has rather proved otherwise. Particularly in Bangladesh we have the unique example of the non-party caretaker government consisting of the Chief Adviser at its head and not more than ten other Advisers. The last three non-party caretaker governments undoubtedly administered the country better than any other party government. The old saying "country and nation must get priority over party and party must get priority over individual" has not yet been able to influence our political parties and politicians. The sooner it materialises, the better it is for the country and the nation.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the Government.

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there has been a tendency for a big Cabinet in Bangladesh. The ministers outnumber the portfolios and this sometimes creates problems for allocating portfolios among the ministers. Downsizing the Cabinet will help reduce the cost of the government. The chairman of the committee will communicate with the Speaker of the Parliament for placement of the bill in the House. If the Speaker allows placement of the bill in the House, then it will be sent to the Standing Committee on Ministry of Law for scrutiny. The passage of the bill will require amendments to Arti-

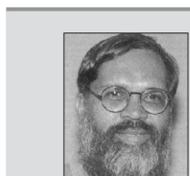
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Members' Bills and Resolutions has decided to table a bill in the House, which has proposed to reduce the size of the council of ministers. Reduction of the size of the entire government that is, the Cabinet and the permanent set-up of the government at all levels, has been a regular urge of the multilateral donor agencies. Different national quarters have also been extending support to this idea because the bigger portion of the national budget has to be spent to maintain a big core of administrative staff to implement a development programme for which not much

with the approval of the Prime Minister may specify by order, the cases or classes of cases which may be disposed of by the Minister of State/Deputy Minister."

But examples are very rare where the Ministers-in-charge of ministries have, with the approval of the Prime Minister, specified by order the cases to be disposed of by the Ministers of State or Deputy Ministers in the relevant ministries. This has been the bone of contention between the Minister-in-charge of a ministry and the Minister of State/Deputy Minister there since the early nineties. The

# No Indo-Pak breakthrough but there is hope yet



PRAFUL BIDWAI

writes from New Delhi

GIVEN history, it's easy to be pessimistic about India-Pakistan relations. The first round of talks between them is no exception to this. The talks didn't produce major results.

Beyond agreeing to extend the 10 month-long border ceasefire, grant each other's citizens tourist visas, and hold more discussions on confidence-building measures (CBMs), the two Foreign Ministers had little to show.

They did some plain speaking at their joint press conference, with Pakistan sticking to the "centrality" of the Kashmir issue, and India stressing "cross-border terrorism." Why, some people even saw this conference as "a war of words!"

Such a pessimistic assessment is unwarranted. Given both the immediate backdrop to the Ministers' talks, and the "structural" nature of many India-Pakistan differences, no dramatic breakthrough could be

expected in one round. But the absence of rancour at the outcome and the "good chemistry" between Pakistani and Indian leaders means that the dialogue will continue at a higher level of mutual confidence -- provided their leaders invest energies in it and ensure the climate of goodwill isn't vitiated.

Today, it's reasonable to expect progress on trade relations, transportation links between Rajasthan and Sindh, easier visa regimes and people-to-people contacts. The two sides will meet on the very worthy proposal for a bus service between

The latest round began amidst discordant noises and allegations of "cross-border" infiltration. National Security Advisor J.N. Dixit said India-Pakistan relations are "held hostage" by differences over Kashmir: Pakistanis are so Kashmir-obsessed that if you ask them even for a glass of water, they will demand "you first solve the Kashmir problem."

This remark drew a strong riposte from Mr Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri. "Kashmiris are not holding India and Pakistan hostage. By denying them their rights, we have kept their future in limbo, and ours in a state of perpet-

tonnes), mainly from the Gulf. India could easily sell it 1.5 million tonnes of diesel at a lower cost.

The Indian pipeline from Panipat to Jalandhar could be usefully extended to Lahore. If Pakistan needs more diesel, another pipeline can be laid from Jamnagar in Gujarat. India could also transfer expertise on using natural gas in public buses.

India has now come to recognise the viability of an overland gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan. This will be about 10 times cheaper than an underwater pipeline. But won't Pakistan turn off the gas in a tense

Pakistan economic cooperation. That could produce new CBMs and create trust.

Yet, India-Pakistan differences over Kashmir won't be easy to resolve. This is a tangled issue, on which both countries centre their definitions of nationhood.

How far can Pakistan and India depart from stated positions? Pakistan can afford to be relatively flexible. It would like the whole of Jammu and Kashmir. But, at minimum, it might accept a loose federal arrangement for Kashmir.

This must be explored without

international border, but which still satisfies Pakistan, and more vitally, the Kashmiri people?

Kashmir's division will be opposed by people on both sides of the LoC. Besides, it will create a perennially unhappy neighbour. On the other hand, 58 years after Partition, Pakistan's religion-based claim to Kashmir sounds untenable. Yet, Kashmir has a pro-Pakistan constituency.

Reconciling all these considerations will need some creative proposals. These should be circulated in civil society and negotiated after they have received inputs, especially from Kashmiris.

An arrangement could be considered in which both India and Pakistan grant their respective parts of Kashmir exceptional autonomy, and create a "soft" border across which progressively freer movement is allowed. Security and autonomy of both zones must be guaranteed by the two states.

Such ideas sound idealistic. But they were actually discussed 40 years ago. Proposed by Sheikh Abdullah, and elaborated during a 1964 trip to Pakistan, they had Nehru's support.

We need to think "out of the box" on Kashmir. We must pursue the dialogue in good faith. Failure could be fatal.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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Muzaffarabad and Srinagar.

At the end of the day, a roadmap has emerged. This spells sustained continuation of the dialogue. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Musharraf will meet later this month in New York. Officials will meet in October-November to discuss transportation links, narcotics control, and communications between border forces. They will jointly survey Sir Creek.

The two Foreign Secretaries will meet in December. And there will be another meeting between Dr Singh and Gen Musharraf during the January SAARC summit.

ual tension." This drew an accusation from India of Pakistan's "unifocal" concerns.

Yet, the talks took place in a "cordial, friendly" and "affable" atmosphere. This speaks of a commitment on both sides to carrying forward the dialogue, rather than engage in knee-jerk responses and dissipate the positive momentum -- an all-too-familiar pattern.

Now India and Pakistan must quickly seal an energy cooperation deal, as discussed by Mr Kasuri and Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar. Pakistan imports half its annual petroleum requirements (18 million

period?

These concerns can be addressed through contracts (providing for penalties for turning off supply and allowing international arbitration in disputes). Such a pipeline seems technologically sound. Pakistan stands to gain \$700-800 million as transit fees.

The pipeline could lay the basis for larger-scale gas transportation from Turkmenistan over Afghanistan-Pakistan and open new Indian vistas in hydrocarbon-rich Central Asia -- subject to energy conservation. Its very negotiation will have demonstrated the potential for India-

coercion by jihadi militants. Pakistan must also stop pushing Kashmiri leaders like Messrs Omar Farooq, Yasin Malik, and Shabbir Shah to accept the hawkish Syed Ali Shah Geelani's tutelage of the Hurriyat.

India, for its part, must confront the reality of alienation of the Kashmiri people. As the status quo power, it's tempting for India to skirt Kashmir while trying to improve relations with Pakistan. But it must rise above this and think of alternative arrangements.

Can it propose something that averts a division of Kashmir through the conversion of the LoC into an

# Dhaka's bloody August

DR MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

EVERY year in the month of August the nation goes into mourning. Bangladesh witnessed one of the most gruesome killing sprees in the history of mankind staged in Dhaka on August 15, 1975. In the same year on November 3, four national leaders were brutally slaughtered when they were in custody in Dhaka central prison. The Bloody August of 1975, however, was more daunting when the father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his entire family (except two daughters who were out of country) were brutally murdered by disgruntled members of the nation's army and their civilian allies.

At 5:22 pm. A grenade charge was carried out on the AL gathering on this ill-fated day in order to eliminate the eldest daughter of the father of the nation and to wipe out the entire leadership of the AL. Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the opposition, survived the carnage, however, the perpetrators managed to kill 19 valiant sons and daughters of the land, including a front line AL leader Iy Rahman, while injuring a further 300 demonstrators and bystanders. Like it or not, these incidents have turned us into one of the most terror-abounding and uncivilised states on earth. It is, however, surprising that the BNP-alliance government has been in constant denial of the existence of terrorists in the country and has continuously played the blame-game during the last three years. Extraor-

dinarily, instead of capturing the terrorists, the government, which has a two-thirds majority in the parliament, has been blaming the victims for such incidents! Why?

One does not have to be an FBI or Scotland Yard agent to understand the pattern and reasons for attacking the AL gatherings in recent months. But, the government remains indifferent, defiant, and unapologetic. It is now clear that since the PM is not in control, she has been making baseless claims of terrorist activities all over the nation. None of her claims so far found a shred of evidence. By repeatedly playing the blame card she seems unaware that it has been tarnishing the credibility and image of the nation at home and abroad and in turn giving grounds to the terrorists. No one takes notice when her cabinet

colleagues speak nonsense. However, the nation certainly takes notice when it hears baseless stories from the horse's mouth. For example, the DS categorically pointed out on September 4 that "PM's finger pointing is injudicious in relation to her accusation at the main opposition party, for having carried out the 21 August 21 grenade attack on the Awami League rally."

Immediately after the general election in 2001, the present author observed that "Looking at history, in early 1930s Hitler had a landslide, and more closer to home, a few years back Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan had a landslide over Benazir's PPP. History tells us how these landslides transformed into nightmares for those nations. In this term (2001-06), how the BNP-alliance performs with

a landslide is anybody's guess. A landslide victory of a political party or alliance makes the democratic process weak. In this process opposition becomes irrelevant. With a weak opposition, the incumbent becomes authoritarian or even complacent in running the government. In the last 10 years, landslide or otherwise, Bangladesh has seen almost no role for the opposition except for the nation frequently to a complete halt (hatalts). Until the opposition gets its proper say and due share in the affairs of the nation, democracy is likely to remain illusive in the years to come". It appears that

With our "home-grown" democracy it is unequivocal that the "prime

minister" is the "government" and the "government" is the "prime minister." I am sure the readers would agree that what is being carried out in the name of democracy over the last fourteen years was not what was agreed upon by our leaders when President Ershad was thrown out of office by people power in 1990. Instead, from both sides of politics, the nation was expecting liberal democracy to thrive, no shedding of blood, and above all, peace and security. Our politicians not only failed to keep their promises, but have made a U-turn in their actions. Consequently, in recent years the nation has been branded as a dysfunctional state at home and abroad. It is sad, very sad, indeed.

There is no doubt in our mind that the terrorists and their allies who

executed the latest bloodbath in Dhaka have been using, to their advantage, the deteriorating relations between the two major parties, AL and BNP. Unfortunately, the incumbent has been ignoring this truth for a long time and has even ridiculed the opposition leader in the parliament with regard to a threat on her life. The government not only ignored the opposition's call, but also reduced the opposition leader's security contingent. What does it mean? The government does not care what happens to the leader of the largest party of the nation.

Under the present circumstances, if the government genuinely regrets the attack on the opposition and wants cooperation from the opposition leader, it needs to repair first the irreversible damage already done to

the relationship. For damage control, the PM and her cabinet should come forward with open hands and minds. To this end, the first thing that comes to mind is that the Law Minister, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, should allow a smooth passage of the Bangabandhu murder case verdict, the first legal pronouncement of the bloody August of 1975. Is he prepared to do this? I do not think so, because such a miracle generally does not happen in Bangladesh. However, until this is done, the opposition is likely to keep fighting for the justice that has been denied to the nation for the last three decades.

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