

## President, CA and services chiefs in Tungipara

Hopeful moves towards a national consensus

WE at The Daily Star congratulate President Iajuddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and the chiefs of the three armed services on their visit to Tungipara to pay homage to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15. It was a truly appropriate gesture, one that the Founder of the State surely deserves for his pivotal role in the creation of this free Bangladesh republic in 1971. Indeed, the presence of the head of state, head of government on the one hand and the chiefs of the army, navy and air force on the other at Bangabandhu's grave is evidence of a convergence of thoughts among them on the place of Bangabandhu in our national history. More significantly, the honour thus shown to Bangabandhu ought to be seen as a reflection of a long-felt national desire to see the country's founder placed on a proper pedestal. The gesture is demonstrative of a process of vindication regarding Bangabandhu's status.

In the overall sense, we believe that what took place in Tungipara on Wednesday augurs well for the country's future. Of course, August 15 was not officially observed as National Mourning Day. Despite that, however, the presence at Bangabandhu's mausoleum of individuals occupying such powerful and influential positions in the state structure is symbolic of the national will to have Bangabandhu placed above all controversy and given the historical perch he so richly deserves. In other words, in Tungipara there was a *de facto* acknowledgement of Bangabandhu's death anniversary as National Mourning Day. It was, we are convinced, a healthy attitude adopted by the powers that be and should serve as an indication of the transparent, purposeful politics we would like to see define our collective national being in the times ahead.

It must be noted, though, that the observance of Bangabandhu's death anniversary this year was rather muted at the political level. Besides, it was largely confined to the capital. Such an absence of a demonstration of public sentiment, despite the signals going out from the top levels of the state, of course had to do with the fact that the country is currently under a state of emergency. But since the presence of such a high level team in Tungipara can be considered a sign of things to be, we will hope and expect that it will mark the building of a consensus around Bangabandhu's place in history and will be seen as a beginning to the shaping of a unified national response to the observance of his death anniversary as National Mourning Day.

## Managing waterborne diseases

Fill in the gaps

WITH the flood waters receding, incidence of various types of waterborne diseases is rapidly increasing. Each day people afflicted in the low lying peripheries of the capital city through ICDDR,B, the premier centre for treatment of diarrhoea and cholera in the country. On 14 August the centre registered the highest number of patients in a day since its establishment 47 years ago.

If this is the situation in around the capital city one can well imagine as to what it would be like in the inundated rural areas of the country. The government's monitoring cell has identified as many as 1526 unions and 217 upazilas as being seriously affected by water-borne diseases. These figures are based on reported cases, so that the actual magnitude of the incidence may be bigger.

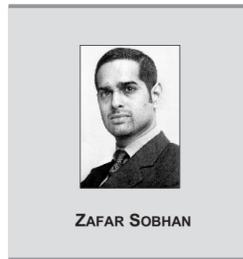
We are in the dark as to the status of other waterborne diseases like typhoid, hepatitis, viral fever, pneumonia, skin diseases and conjunctivitis.

Only the other day, for the first time, the authorities put out a request through the electronic media, with any visible degree of urgency, that patients should report to nearby public hospitals and health centres at the upazila, thana and union levels.

We strongly suggest that along with ensuring emergency medicare and attention, specific programmes should be undertaken in dealing with the acute malnutrition and lack of sanitation that are exacerbating the overall health situation. Urgent attention should be given to ensure availability of safe and clean water by repairing the cross-leakage between the water supply network and sewer lines. This measure along with free supply of water purification tablets and clean bottled water should result in drastically reducing the incidence of diseases.

In dealing with diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid, hepatitis we need a steady supply of ORS, IV saline and different kinds of antibiotics respectively. It is not enough to say that the factories are working overtime and stocks are sufficient, what is more to the point is their timely distribution to the affected people. Time is of the essence here.

## Tragedy of errors



ZAFAR SOBHAN

IN Bangladesh we like to pride ourselves on the observation that whenever the Bangladeshi people have been given the opportunity to vote their consciences, that we have delivered wise, responsible, and mature political judgements.

This interpretation of history takes as a starting point the 1954 provincial elections that brought the United Front to power, and continues through the 1970 national assembly elections that afforded the AL its massive majority that helped pave the way for an independent Bangladesh.

The next election to be generally accepted as free and fair came in 1991, in which the Bangladeshi people shocked the political classes when they voted the BNP to power, contrary to the conventional wisdom and despite the fact that the AL was at the time a far more formidable and established political machine.

Nor can the public's political judgement be faulted for the unceremonious removal of the BNP from office in 1996 or for voting the AL out of power in 2001.

But the point that I wish to make is that this narrative is only convinc-

ing if we start our calculations in 1954 and overlook the most consequential election ever held in this land, the election of 1946, in which, it can be argued, that the people (or at least one community) of the land that is now Bangladesh made a fateful choice, from which all sub-continental history since then flows.

Following the 1946 elections, Bengal, where the Muslim League won 110 seats out of 117 reserved for Muslims, provided the only provincial League ministry, and it was both the support of Bengali Muslims for Pakistan as well as their political control of the province that eventually provided the foundation and impetus for partition and Pakistan.

But one cannot be too hard on Bengali Muslims for their steadfast support for the Muslim League, and thus ultimately for Pakistan, throughout the 1940s. As Mr. Islam points out in his superb piece printed opposite, the true watershed moment came in the aftermath of the 1936 elections when the Congress declined to form a coalition ministry with Fazlul Huq's KPP and independents, leaving the opening for the League to join forces with the non-aligned Muslim

## STRAIGHT TALK

It was in the run-up to the 1965 war that the borders were permanently closed and have remained so ever since (even after 1971). It is this partition that has kept the peoples of the three countries apart from one another and that has cleaved the sub-continent into three, and while we will forever remain three sovereign nations, it is this partition that it is in all of our powers and all of our interests to reverse.

political power-houses in the region and to eventually dominate East Bengal politics.

Thus, by the time 1946 came along, the Bengali Muslims were squarely in the League camp, and there were no other realistic options available. How and why politicians of the acumen and calibre of Fazlul Huq and H.S. Suhrawardy permitted themselves to be played by Jinnah, who turned on them as soon they had served their purpose, and be used as his generals in the battle for the creation of a country that served neither their personal political interest nor that of their constituencies, is another question.

How might history have unfolded differently? One alternative to partition could have been a united federated Indian sub-continent along the lines laid out by the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, perhaps the most ingenious and comprehensive effort to accommodate both Muslim League and Congress demands prior to independence. However, by 1947, this possibility or any similar one was long dead and buried.

A second alternative would have been for a united Bengal to

be incorporated into Pakistan, i.e. Pakistan without partition. However, this possibility was scotched on June 20, 1947 in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, when members of the non-Muslim-majority areas of Bengal voted 58-21 for partition. However, given the fact that the assembly as a whole had voted (more or less along communal lines) 126-90 for Pakistan, this is understandable.

Finally, there was the possibility of a United Bengal, as proposed by H.S. Suhrawardy and Sarat Chandra Bose, which, though it had the support of other prominent Bengali Congress and League leaders such as Abul Hashim and Kiran Shankar Roy, was opposed by others, and was eventually snuffed out by the two parties' central leaderships.

In the end, there was partition which split Bengal for good and led (for Bangladeshis) to 24 years of oppression.

Partition is a difficult subject for Bangladeshis. The conventions of patriotism seem to require that we never suggest that partition was a mistake and that the sub-continent would have been better

off remaining in one piece, regardless of the fact that to any impartial observer this seems more or less self-evident.

The argument against partition is bolstered, in the Bangladeshi case, by the recognition that Pakistan, as originally conceived and created, was a travesty of a nation, built on entirely flawed concepts. But this recognition, interestingly, does not seem to translate into the corollary understanding that partition itself was a mistake. It is as though to argue that partition was a mistake is to argue that Bangladesh should not exist, since without partition there would be no Bangladesh.

But I don't see it that way. It seems to me that there is no necessary contradiction in acknowledging that Pakistan was a fallacious concept to begin with and in being a patriotic Bangladeshi, even though Bangladesh exists as a sovereign nation only in the context of a reaction to the creation of the nation of Pakistan.

So let me run the risk of having my patriotism questioned by stating that it seems to me incontestable that partition was a mistake.

However, I would like to finish here by quoting eminent Indian columnist and editor, M.J. Akbar, who has written eloquently about the three partitions of the sub-continent. We all know about the partition of 1947 and the partition (if you will) of 1971. But, according to Akbar, it was the partition of 1965 which has had the most far reaching consequences and which is the one that we should aim to reverse.

Prior to 1965, the borders between India and Pakistan were more or less

open and goods and people traveled back and forth freely. It was in the run-up to the 1965 war that the borders were permanently closed and have remained so ever since (even after 1971). It is this partition that has kept the peoples of the three countries apart from one another and that has cleaved the sub-continent into three, and while we will forever remain three sovereign nations, it is this partition that it is in all of our powers and all of our interests to reverse.

Indeed, going forward, there is no reason why we Bangladeshis cannot enjoy the best of all worlds. There is no need to sacrifice our sovereignty and our national pride to avail ourselves of all the advantages of a united sub-continent.

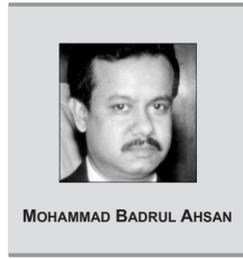
As geographic and demographic imperatives and inevitabilities become impossible to resist and we move closer and closer towards total regional integration and cooperation, we will gain the benefits of a united federated Indian sub-continent as envisaged by the Cabinet Mission Plan 60 years ago.

But as an added bonus, Bangladeshis will, at the same time, be able to enjoy what no other sub-continental community -- neither the Sindhis nor the Tamils nor the Punjabis nor the Gujaratis nor even our Bengali brethren across the border -- can boast: our own nation, our own flag, our own cricket team -- in short, our sovereignty.

All things considered, and against all the odds, perhaps it didn't work out so badly for us in the end, after all.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

## Whose security and whose council?

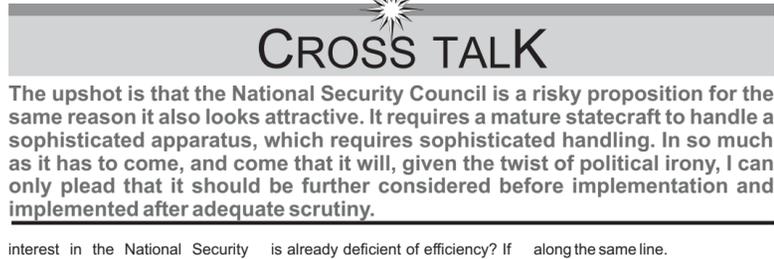


MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IT'S fascinating, in all of this, to watch a nation in its trajectory of craze. There is full-grown craze which originates in its proponents and then intoxicates people with wild frenzy. The liberation wars, revolutions, and popular upheavals come under this category. Then there is also craze which goes off at half-cock. It has the risk of people who laugh at their own jokes. The proponents, intoxicated by their own idea, don't wait to hear from other people.

To cut to the chase, another ill-concocted craze may be in the offing. I say another because the country is yet to recover from the monumental failure of the caretaker system. Now who doesn't remember that once it was seen as the silver bullet for the ills of power transition? It was hyped up so much by those who believed in it that they didn't bother to find out if the people were also equally convinced.

The new craze is the heightened



## CROSS TALK

The upshot is that the National Security Council is a risky proposition for the same reason it also looks attractive. It requires a mature statecraft to handle a sophisticated apparatus, which requires sophisticated handling. In so much as it has to come, and come that it will, given the twist of political irony, I can only plead that it should be further considered before implementation and implemented after adequate scrutiny.

interest in the National Security Council. It is being played as an essential for political reforms like no cake is complete without icing. The idea has been endorsed by many opinion leaders already, and more of them will find it politically expedient to rally around it. There is a temporary lull due to the flood, and it will bounce back into national discourse after the water recedes.

So, no dribbling and slam dunk: Why do we need a National Security Council? Well, there are some countries in the world, which have this executive branch governmental body. Perhaps that is one good reason why we should also have it.

The other reason is more obvious. Since the army came to our rescue last January, it is only fair that a grateful nation should find them a rightful place at the nation's table.

The question is what good is it going to do if we create another layer within the government, which

is already deficient of efficiency? If we are going to have to yank a derailed train back on the track, how does it make sense to start loading up the wagons?

Fine, other countries have it and we would like to keep up with the Joneses. A search in Google throws up the names of China, Taiwan, Iran, Israel, India, US, UK, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Turkey, Tajikistan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan as countries, which have a National Security Council. The oldest is in the US, created in 1947, and the newest is in the UK, created last March.

By definition, the council is responsible for coordinating policy on national security issues and advising presidents and prime ministers on matters related to national security. In China, the council is known as the Central Military Commission, which is responsible for supervising the nation's armed forces. Vietnam and North Korea have commissions

along the same line.

In the US, the National Security Council is the principal forum used by the president for considering national security and foreign policy matters with his senior national security advisors and cabinet officials and is part of the his executive office.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair formed the National Security Council in UK to combat terrorism.

The Supreme National Security Council of Iran includes amongst its other responsibilities the exploitation of materialistic and intellectual resources of the country for facing the internal and external threats.

In Pakistan, the National Security Council was set up as a ploy to give large powers to the country's president, who had traditionally been a figurehead, with actual powers lying with the prime minister.

The Indian National Security Council was created in 1988 but

largely remained inactive without any representation from the military brass until Manmohan Singh breathed new life into it.

Recently the newly-elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy has put forward an idea to establish a National Security Council, but the French are already clamouring that it shouldn't be a copycat model of the American outfit, but a French-style one.

What will be the form of our National Security Council, should we decide to go ahead? Not much details yet and all we know, it will have representations from politicians, bureaucrats, army, and prominent citizens of other professions. But what will it do and how far will it go? Let us say it will do more or less a cross-section of what it does in other countries.

But is it the right time to have the National Security Council? The main reason why the caretaker government has been installed is to renovate our wobbling political structure, and strengthen the institutions, which were falling apart. And the State of Emergency came like an anesthesia prior to surgical intervention.

This government has done a good job with that, striking at the roots of corruption, forcing political parties so that they will undergo reforms, reconstituting key institutions, and restoring hope that a free and fair election can be held in

2008.

All that being as it is, what will the National Security Council change? In the US, where it originated, the institution has mostly remained under the fold of presidents. The council has gone through many fluctuations in its 60 years of age, remaining neglected by Truman, revived by Eisenhower, ignored by Kennedy, so forth and so on. The case against the sitting George Bush is that he has turned the National Security Council into a pocket organisation.

The upshot is that the National Security Council is a risky proposition for the same reason it also looks attractive. It requires a mature statecraft to handle a sophisticated apparatus, which requires sophisticated handling. In so much as it has to come, and come that it will, given the twist of political irony, I can only plead that it should be further considered before implementation and implemented after adequate scrutiny.

Why not wait until the next parliament so that people are also convinced that it is a council for their security? On that note, I rest my case.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## State of anxiety

For the United States, the No. 1 concern is figuring out a way to crush the resurgence of Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Waziristan and Bajaur, without doing fatal damage to Musharraf. Some US officials say the Pakistani military is simply not up to the job -- but no one else may be, either. "This is a part of the country that has not been effectively governed since Alexander the Great was there," says Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Gastright

MICHAEL HIRSH and RON MOREAU

PERVEZ Musharraf has always been a dubious ally in George W. Bush's War on Terror -- the kind of guy you avert your eyes from while patting him on the back. It's not that Bush doubts the Pakistani leader's sincerity -- "He shares the same concern about radicals and extremists as I do and as the American people do," the president said at an August 9 news conference -- it's just that Musharraf is never going to make it into Bush's democracy club. And Musharraf's ability to stop his nation's Islamist radicalism from spilling over into terrorism has always been limited.

A genial autocrat who seized power in a 1999 coup and has refused to relinquish his general's uniform, Musharraf has succeeded in keeping Washington on his side by regularly handing over second-tier

Qaeda suspects and by keeping tenuous control over his increasingly Islamised country.

But now Musharraf may be losing his grip on power amid rising concerns by senior US officials that a new safe haven for Al Qaeda has emerged in Pakistan's rocky, ungoverned tribal regions, especially Waziristan.

As a result, an increasing number of voices in Washington -- from Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama to hard-line officials in the Bush administration -- are calling for unilateral military action inside Pakistan. NEWSWEEK has learned that for weeks Pentagon officials have been debating the current policy of not violating Pakistani sovereignty, coming down in favour of restraint.

But some officers in Joint Special Operations Command are "pawing the ground to go into Waziristan,"

says one Pentagon consultant who is privy to the debate but would speak about classified discussions only anonymously.

Congress, meanwhile, has passed legislation that threatens to cut off aid to Pakistan if President Bush can't certify that Musharraf is doing all he can. "It's very humiliating for Musharraf," says retired Pakistani Lt. Gen. Talat Masood. "It could even destabilise him."

That's one reason Bush continues to stand by him. Administration officials fear that if Musharraf falls and Pakistan descends into political chaos, then a nuclear-armed state could fail and Pakistan's nuclear know-how might end up in the wrong hands.

Even short of that doomsday scenario, senior US officials, both active and retired, say that without more decisive action Al Qaeda will grow, if not flourish, in the tribal areas.

And someday the US homeland will likely be attacked from there, they say, just as Al Qaeda once used Afghanistan as a base from which to plot the 9/11 attacks.

In late July a National Intelligence Estimate -- a periodic assessment that is considered the most authoritative issued by the US government -- concluded Al Qaeda has "regenerated key elements" of its ability to attack the United States from the tribal regions of North Waziristan and Bajaur.

Hank Crumpton, a near-legendary CIA clandestine service officer who retired last year as the State Department's counterterrorism coordinator, says Washington needs to do more than rely on the Pakistani military and intelligence services. "I'd go in there (tribal areas) with a hard-core counterinsurgency effort," Crumpton told Newsweek. He would seek Pakistan's consent -- "but I wouldn't pretend that this is sovereign territory. It is not."

Another recently retired senior CIA official, Bruce Riedel, says that Pakistan remains fatally conflicted about cracking down on Islamic extremists. That's even though Qaeda No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahiri (who along with Osama bin Laden is believed to be hiding in the Pakistani tribal areas) has tried to assassinate

Musharraf at least twice.

As eager as Musharraf may be to get bin Laden and Zawahiri, his enthusiasm is not necessarily shared by Pakistani intelligence. Riedel says: "It has no desire to either take on its Frankenstein or to see its Frankenstein removed."

Pakistani officials angrily dispute that assessment, and they say they are doing all that can be done. They note that some 350 Pakistani soldiers were killed in tribal actions in 2004 and 2005, leading Musharraf to try to reach a peace agreement with tribal elders that has since frayed.

"There are no safe havens," Mahmud Ali Durrani, Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, told Newsweek, saying the NIE is "absolutely incorrect." "This is preposterous. We will agree there may be odd people in hideouts. But ... whenever we get information we take them out. Even after we signed the agreement, we went into Waziristan and Bajaur five or six times this year. We went after the training camps."

Still, Durrani confirmed that the government is very concerned about the extremists "creeping outside the tribal areas" and said Musharraf had launched "a new push" that includes adding 20,000 more paramilitaries to the 100,000 troops already bordering those areas. That, and additional

training, "will take about six months," Durrani says.

Whether Musharraf has that much time is another question. Since he faced down an Islamist rebellion at a mosque in the heart of his capital city, Islamabad, he has appeared to lose control of his country's security.

Al Qaeda-affiliated armed militants have retaliated strongly, killing nearly 200 people, chiefly police and soldiers, in a spate of IED attacks and suicide bombings in the lawless tribal region along the Afghan frontier, as well as two suicide attacks in Islamabad.

In response, the Pakistani leader has flirted with the idea of declaring a state of emergency that would extend his rule for at least one year, postponing both the presidential election, scheduled for late next month, and the general election, due early next year.

The state of emergency would give him sweeping powers and allow him to curb civil liberties sharply. After an early-morning call from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on August 9, however, Musharraf agreed to back down "for the time being," a US official said, speaking as usual on condition of anonymity about high-level discussions.

Yet another measure of Musharraf's waning power is the

eagerness with which he has politically courted a woman he once publicly called a "thief" for alleged corruption during her two terms as Prime Minister -- Benazir Bhutto.

In early August Musharraf flew secretly to Abu Dhabi to meet Bhutto, whose secular Pakistani People's Party remains the most popular in the country. Musharraf had been reaching out to Bhutto halfheartedly for a year, but after he summarily ousted the nation's Supreme Court justice in March, provoking widespread demonstrations, his popularity plummeted.

Now he seems desperate to bring her into a coalition government that will blunt the calls for his resignation. "Musharraf is in a tough place," says Riedel. "She knows she has the upper hand now." In an August 10 interview, Bhutto said the "ground reality" has changed in Pakistan. She confirmed that she and Musharraf are discussing the creation of a "caretaker government," but said she would not join it "while he is wearing his uniform."

For the United States, the No. 1 concern is figuring out a way to crush the resurgence of Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Waziristan and Bajaur, without doing fatal damage to Musharraf.

Some US officials say the Pakistani military is simply not up to

the job -- but no one else may be, either. "This is a part of the country that has not been effectively governed since Alexander the Great was there," says Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Gastright. Pakistani officials point to the successes they've had inside their cities in arresting Qaeda bigwigs like Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.

Ambassador Durrani says the real fault lies with Washington. After KSM was captured in Rawalpindi in March 2003 -- just as Bush was invading Iraq -- "I think Al Qaeda was almost destroyed in an operational sense. But then Al Qaeda got a vacuum in Afghanistan. And they got a motivational area in Iraq. Al Qaeda rejuvenated."

And what Pakistan is getting now is the blowback from that, rather than the other way around." The worry now is that blowback will come day cross the Atlantic -- and no one is effectively stopping it.