

## Moving towards a new Pakistan

**Thanks God. Now the Pakistan army is learning some lessons. New Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kyani has issued orders that the army should stay away from politics. He is even not interested in helping the pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League. He is not interested in postponing the elections on February 18. He is sure that only a true democracy can save the country. Banning the politicians is not a solution, so he is ready to treat all the politicians equally. I hope that if there is a free and fair election on February 18th, Pakistan will move ahead in the right direction.**

HAMID MIR

ZAKI is a Palestinian journalist working for a popular Arab TV channel. He appreciated a recent move from Pakistani media and lawyers who said sorry to the people of Bangladesh for the genocide of 1971. Zaki demanded that we Pakistanis should also say sorry to Palestinians because our army officers were responsible for the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in September 1970 in Jordan.

I told Zaki that Pakistani media and lawyers were not responsible for the genocide of more than three million people in Bangladesh. This crime against humanity was committed on the orders of some army generals and Pakistani soldiers implemented those orders.

We Pakistanis actually want that our army should apologise to Bangladeshis, we were demanding that apology from many months when we realised that it may take a long time for us to say sorry to

Bangladeshis on behalf of Pakistani civilians, but the case of Palestinians is entirely different. Brigadier Zia ul Haq (who later became army chief and grabbed power in Pakistan in 1977) commanded the second division of the Jordanian army in 1970. He launched an operation against Palestinian freedom fighters with the help of the US army in Amman.

These freedom fighters were involved in the hijacking of Swiss Air and Pan Am planes. They were involved in assassination attempts against King Hussein of Jordan so the king requested help from Pakistan and the Pakistan government gave the services of Brigadier Zia. This officer implemented his plan with the Jordanian army.

Zaki was not satisfied. He argued that it was General Yahya Khan who ordered Brigadier Zia to kill Palestinians in 1970, and it was Yahya again who ordered General Tikka Khan and General Niazi to kill Bangladeshis in 1971.

Zaki said that if we could say

sorry for a crime committed against Bangladeshis by Yahya, then why could we not say sorry for a crime committed against Palestinians by the same Yahya? Zaki certainly had a point. Ultimately, I said sorry to him for a crime which I had personally never committed, but I felt ashamed that Zia was a Pakistani who had killed Palestinians.

Many powerful people in the Pakistani establishment are already unhappy with me for my stance on the genocide of 1971, but I have no guilt. The majority of the Pakistanis supported our sorry move.

No doubt, December 25, 2007, was a historical day in the history of Pakistan. It was the birthday of Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Journalists, writers, poets, lawyers, students and other members of the civil society were celebrating this birthday on a footpath in front of Islamabad Press Club as a protest against the Musharraf regime.

Many leaders of the Christian community were also celebrating Christmas day on the same footpath, showing their solidarity with media and the lawyers. It was the first time that the birthday of Jinnah was celebrated on a footpath of the capital of Pakistan. Many speakers said that Pakistan was facing a 1971 like situation.

An ex-civil servant, Roedad Khan, said that he served in Dhaka in 1971 as the secretary information and he saw how the Pakistan army was killing Bengali Pakistanis who were just demanding rule of law in the country. The violence of army created more violence, and that was how Pakistan disintegrated.

Roedad Khan said that the Pakistan army was once again killing Pakistanis from Islamabad to Baluchistan, and that this violence would create more violence. After his speech, I was invited to address the crowd. I presented a resolution that today we must say sorry to our Bangladeshi brothers and sisters for the genocide of '71, on behalf of common Pakistanis, and we must demand that the government of Pakistan should also tender an "official apology." Unexpectedly, the whole crowd supported my resolution.

Within minutes, some students wrote a banner with black markers saying "dear Bangladeshis, sorry for the '71 genocide." The banner was immediately placed on the

small stage of the gathering. This banner created shock waves in the ranks of the police deployed around our gathering, but they remained silent.

Later in the evening, when we were leaving the place, an old man stopped us. He was a Pashtun. He asked me: "Bacha, you apologised to the Bangladeshis after 36 years, but who will apologise for the genocide in Lal Masjid in July 2007?"

It was actually the genocide in Lal Masjid which helped most Pakistanis to understand what actually may have happened to their Bangladeshi brothers in 1971. The Lal Masjid crisis started in January 2007 when Capital Development Authority demolished seven mosques in the city in the name of beautification. The Khateeb of Lal Masjid opposed the demolition of the mosques, and female students of an adjacent madrassah occupied a nearby building as protest.

They demanded the rebuilding of the demolished mosques. This crisis continued for six months and, in the end, Musharraf decided to impress America by killing young students in the name of war against terror. He declared this Masjid as the den of al-Qaeda in Pakistan. Lal Masjid was first attacked with rockets, and then commandos of the Pakistan army stormed the Masjid compound. Hundreds of students were killed

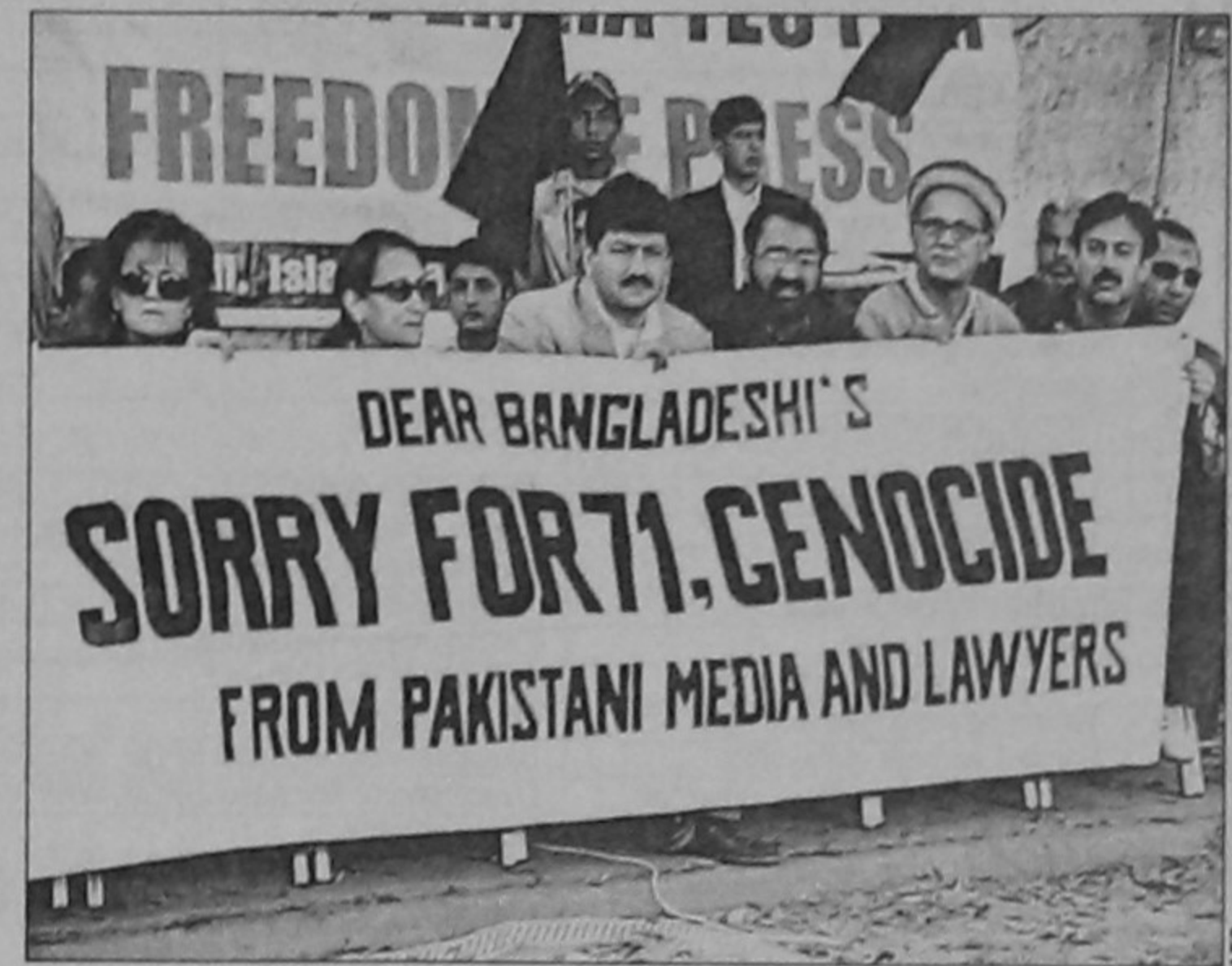
inside the mosque, but their bodies were set on fire to remove evidence of the genocide.

Burned bodies were buried in mass graves outside the city. Hundreds of students and teachers are still missing. The Supreme Court of Pakistan took notice of the genocide and started an inquiry, and that was why Musharraf removed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry on November 3rd, 2007.

Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry was becoming a threat for the intelligence agencies that were also responsible for the genocide of Baluch rebels in 2006 and genocide in Pashtun tribal areas in the year 2005. Many analysts are of the view that the recent wave of suicide bombings in Pakistan is actually a reaction to the genocide in Pashtun tribal areas.

CIA and the Pakistan army first used these Pashtun tribes against Russians, and now the same powers are killing them in the name of war against terror. CIA always supported army generals in Pakistan because they were ready to kill their own countrymen for pleasing the Americans. Pakistan army generals even killed the first elected prime minister of the country, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. These generals became dirty politicians and destroyed their own country.

Thanks God. Now the Pakistan army is learning some lessons. New Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez



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Then new government must try to resolve the problems in Pashtun tribal areas through dialogue, not through guns and bombs. Pakistan will not become another Iraq if the army stays away from politics. CIA

again wants that the Pakistan army should kill more Pashtuns, using the assassination of Benazir Bhutto as an excuse, but her party has a different stance. PPP is not ready to buy the CIA claim that those Pashtun sympathisers of al-Qaeda killed Benazir.

They would like to start a new probe after February 18th because that day may change Pakistan. This country will survive even without Musharraf because no one in this world is indispensable. It will be a new Pakistan after February 18th, and one day our government will definitely say an official sorry, not only to Bangladeshis but also to Palestinians.

Hamid Mir writes from Pakistan.

## Where's this heading?

**In the one-year of emergency rule this government had to make some tough decisions and changes affecting the economy, politics and governance -- on top of that, floods, cyclones and other disasters kept this administration on its toes. Certainly, the price hike is beginning to bite. And considering the colossal mess, thanks to the previous administrations, which the CTG inherited, it is only natural there would be mistakes in policies. And one of the past leaders has the gall to suggest that these CTG advisors do not know how to run a government -- well, they had their chances, look where we were before 1/11!**

S. I. ZAMAN

BANGLADESHIS are easily given to emotional and impetuous outbursts when it comes to politics, or indeed any petty issue of national concern. And they are also full of unconstructive criticism of whoever takes the helm of the government. They so easily succumb to momentary "creature comfort" and forget the past. They suffer from an acute case of short-term memory!

One year on since 1/11, and the tabloids and the TV talk shows are already filled with the cacophony of latter day political pundits -- with their endless tirade of negative criticism for the CTG.

The reform issue, that emerged as the most burning issue, particularly for the political parties, has been conveniently tucked away by the parties. The leaders of both the main parties

are continuing to make statements that have the familiar ring of their pre-1/11 positions -- they are full of "criticism for the sake of criticism" -- and the same old hackneyed cry for an early election and, of course, it has to be "free and fair."

Free and fair it must be, however the question is whether or not the defeated party would be able to swallow a "fair" defeat and would not try to sabotage smooth functioning of the ruling party and would not wreak havoc on the nation, as this unfortunate nation has seen in the past, time and time again.

People are fed up with the same old clichés and rhetoric that come out of these leaders' mouths -- Abadh shushtho o niropekkho nirbachon -- jonogoner jononatrik odhikar -- shobar jonno shikha shastho bashsthan er nishchit kora -- shompoder shushtho bonton -- naair

shomoodhikar, and much more.

Amazingly enough, these leaders still have their heads in the clouds. Particularly, AL acting Chairman Zillur Rahman, who has been repeatedly coming out with the most no-Hasina-no-election type of rhetoric. It begs the questions: Has there been any party reform at all or, indeed, has there been any substantial change in the mindset of the leaders? Or is it that the sickness in the party is so endemic that no antidotes (read reform) would work? And there are others who are beginning to take a forgive-and-forget stance!

As for Hasina's and Begum Zia's health issues, these can easily be treated in Bangladesh. Besides, why should these leaders have the preferential treatment. If they don't have faith in the health care system of this country, well, the mess in the health care system of this country is of their own



Can we afford to forget this?

making! Hopefully, this will be an eye-opener for them. It's high time they experienced what an average bread-earner of this country goes through on daily basis.

The other BNP leaders (the so called reformist half) have conveniently tucked away their "reform," as we tucked away our winter

clothes for safekeeping. Leaders, and their cronies and acolytes, of the major parties seem to be bubbling with self-righteous defiance -- as though coming out of the wilderness and trying to get a share of the next political gain.

History has shown that progress has a relationship with criti-

cism. Democracy or, indeed, the process of democracy ceases to function without a formidable opposition party in the parliament. The opposition party is like the shadow of the ruling party, keeping a close watch on the governance. These always go hand in hand. But the criticism

ought to be constructive so as not to jeopardise the natural progress of whatever good idea is trying to germinate.

Unfortunately, what we are witnessing sheds no light nor, indeed, any hope that our aspirations would be realised in the next election and thereafter.

The problem with this country is "us," our mindset and our short-term memory, and nothing else. Our self-centered, self-seeking and profiting mindset constantly beckons our vision away from any greater good.

In the one-year of emergency rule this government had to make some tough decisions and changes affecting the economy, politics and governance -- on top of that, floods, cyclones and other disasters kept this administration on its toes.

Certainly, the price hike is beginning to bite. And considering the colossal mess, thanks to the previous administrations, which the CTG inherited, it is only natural there would be mistakes in policies. And one of the past leaders has the gall to suggest that these CTG advisors do not know how to run a government -- well, they had their chances, look where we were before 1/11!

Clearly, we have (conveniently) forgotten what it was like

pre-1/11, what mess the country was in, and what formidable tasks lay ahead for the CTG. This CTG has managed to do what no "democratically" elected government thus far could achieve. They have managed to identify the ills that plagued the administration. They have also made some revolutionary changes in the Acts and regulations that govern the judiciary, PSC, EC, ACC and government bureaucracy.

The antiquated Police Act (1861 Act) is soon going to be replaced by a more realistic and relevant Act, which would regulate the police force so as to make it more user friendly and efficient.

Some interested quarters (possibly extreme factions of either party) are ruthlessly trying to sabotage the functioning of this government. Any further capitulations by the CTG might be detrimental for the nation and, indeed, its own credibility. The prevailing defiant atmosphere, facetious comments and attitudes that have become currency with political parties recently only help to further the apprehension that the coming election, or its aftermath, might just be a disaster!

Dr. S. I. Zaman, University Professor, Oman.

## Price of rice: Is the government responsible?

**The limited number of advisors of the caretaker government are having a tough time dealing with all the problems and issues facing Bangladesh today. The economy, raped and robbed for 36 years and facing a serious inflationary crisis, needs more than an advisor to revive to full potential. The comments regarding inflation, and recent activities at controlling prices at the retail level, are indicative of a clueless ministry having no solid plans to fight the current economic crisis.**

ASIF ANWAR

INFLATION retained a permanent spot in the news for most of 2007, and is the only issue seriously dogging this caretaker government. The newspaper captions have been gradually getting bigger as inflation spreads beyond the kitchen market to almost everything consumable. The recent surge in the price of rice, in a nation of 150 million plus rice-addicted citizens, has elevated inflation to one of the main stories, if not the story.

On the other hand, the usual comments by political parties

blaming the government, and the government's responses and ineffective plans are also finding prominent spots in the front and the back pages of the dailies.

This is my third article on inflation since May 2007, and probably the last on this subject, as I find my efforts are in vain. I claim to be neither an expert (in the trading of commodities in Bangladesh) nor an economist, but the analysis and recommendations in previous articles were based on considerable knowledge of economics (I have a Master's in Economics from University of Delaware, USA in 1994), and more than a decade long career experi-

ence as an investment banker.

Since the publication of the last article on inflation (09/10/07, The Daily Star), I received feedback from prominent economists and market professionals at home and abroad, lending support to the idea of fighting inflation by establishing a commodity exchange.

It has come to my knowledge that a proposal to set up a commodity exchange, as a joint venture with a Dubai based company, has been languishing in the finance ministry for a few months now. Commodity exchange/s is/are a necessary and significant part of the financial infrastructure

of an economy. It has been long due in Bangladesh, as it is necessary to have at least one organised commodities exchange for efficient functioning of an economy. Therefore, immediate steps to establish this infrastructure should be the top priority for this government.

As an added bonus, it has the potential to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and collaboration, create employment, and provide a boost to other industries within the economy, such as construction, technology, etc.

I am not trying to suggest that a commodity exchange will automatically cool down the kitchen market. It does not require an advanced degree in economics to realise that market price is a direct function of supply and demand, and inflation is a natural consequence of demand being higher than available supply. However, market prices are also affected by artificial sources of inflation. In

most cases, these sources are the existence of monopolistic (monopoly seller) or oligopolistic (cartel/syndicate of few sellers) market structures that lack competition.

The recent surge in the price of rice is, of course, a result of demand being higher than supply. However, the right course of action to counter the price hike would depend on accurately identifying the factors responsible for the sudden reduction in supply. If the shortage is suspected to be largely due to natural causes (bad harvest/transport strike/flood etc.), then only a reduction in demand will bring prices down in the retail markets. For example, eating potatoes as a substitute will reduce demand for rice and, eventually, the retail price of rice.

However, despite the clear economic benefits of substituting potatoes is not an option for the rice-addicted Bangladeshis.

reduced supply is artificially created by hoarders or trading syndicates, then the remedy would be in the development of market infrastructure. The oligopolistic nature of our wholesale rice market has bestowed greedy traders the control over supply and, consequently, price. These traders use any natural reduction in supply to create a crisis by restricting supply further (artificially, of course), and manipulate retail prices upwardly beyond natural levels. This is probably the most likely explanation for the recent surge in the price of rice.

I have found (explained in previous articles) our retail kitchen markets/outlets to be adequately competitive, and, therefore, any attempts at controlling price at that level will have no significant impact. However, transforming the existing oligopolistic wholesale market structure into a competitive one, with the introduction of an organ-

ised commodities exchange, will allow market forces to determine price at the wholesale level and, thus, remove possibilities of manipulation by hoarders and syndicates.

No one is to be blamed if prices rise due to natural reduction in supply, or due to increased demand. It is also not possible to build the required financial infrastructure within a short period to fight artificial inflationary pressures arising from the existing imperfect wholesale market structure. The two main political parties did nothing significant in terms of introducing policies for consumer protection, or for developing the required infrastructure to improve competitiveness in the markets. The recent inflationary crisis, due mainly to artificial factors, is a result of the failure of our previous governments. AL and BNP should think twice before blaming this caretaker government, as they are the ones

largely responsible for the crisis facing the nation today.

The limited number of advisors of the caretaker government are having a tough time dealing with all the problems and issues facing Bangladesh today. The economy, raped and robbed for 36 years and facing a serious inflationary crisis, needs more than an advisor to revive to full potential. The comments regarding inflation, and recent activities at controlling prices at the retail level, are indicative of a clueless ministry having no solid plans to fight the current economic crisis. It is time they realise that the same sword fighting corruption may not be as effective fighting inflation. Therefore, paying attention to the recommendations of professionals and market specialists is the only way to avoid further embarrassment handed down by inflation.

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