

Leaving a questionable legacy?

Contrary to his words and the citizens' expectation, how much did he accomplish in terms of establishing rule of law and transparency and accountability of his government? As the chief executive of the government, he is evidently accountable for the deeds of any one "assisting" his government to establish good governance, which certainly he as well as all his fellow citizens expect any future government to emulate.

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

SINCE her arrest last July, Sheikh Hasina has been constantly apprehensive about getting fair trials for all the legal suits that have been brought against her for all the wrongdoings she allegedly had committed a decade or so earlier. In front of the trial judges in the makeshift court houses she repeatedly declared her apprehensions that the verdicts have already been decided and the trial judges, in her words, have no other option but to hand them down regardless of the merits of the incriminations which are expected to unfold during the trial proceedings.

The justifications of her assertions have been reinforced with the accusations of her counsels that a certain "agency" has been intimidating them for working as counsels for the former PM. The public disclosure of intimidation was made by no other than Barrister Shafique Ahmed, a respected legal expert, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA).

Barrister Shafique went as far as

narrating his conversations with the one from the same agency who questioned him why he is running for the SCBA presidency while working as a counsel for Sheikh Hasina, as if it involves conflict of interest and the particular agency is a watch-dog body to oversee it.

If a lawyer of Barrister Shafique's stature could be so questioned by an "agency," it would not be difficult to extrapolate the pressure that a lower court judge would be undergoing, making the premonition of Sheikh Hasina a reality.

Since the installation of second CTG on January 11, 2007 under the leadership of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, I wrote a number of pieces in DS singling out Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed as the chief asset to the government. In fact, in my judgment, I could not find any one better than Dr. Fakhruddin to lead the CTG, both in quality and objectivity.

I was interviewed number of times by local TV stations where I reassured the audience that there was no reason to cast aspersions on the integrity of the Fakhruddin administration to hold a free, fair,

and credible election. My assertion was intensified by a number of speeches he delivered to his fellow citizens over the months, which are remarkable both in contents and style of delivery.

In all of his speeches, the CA emphasised over and over again about establishing rule of law, human rights, good governance, transparency, and accountability. He never forgot to reassert his hold on to the government, that he is in charge and the armed forces are only "assisting" his government, albeit a redundant stipulation, since as an organ of the state, it is bound to "assist" any constitutional government when ordered to do so.

The only exception to his otherwise flawless speeches which he made in Manikganj, the day his government asked for the "assistance" of around a thousand members of the law enforcing agencies, some of them wearing bullet-proof vest, who reportedly brought dog squad with them to arrest an unarmed 60-year-old woman, a former PM, isolated in her home.

Commenting on her arrest, the

CA declared that "no one is above the law." The DS editor Mahfuz Anam in his excellent commentary instantly retorted by asserting: "To say that nobody is above the law must also mean that law is not the handmaiden of anybody either."

Contrary to his words and the citizens' expectation, how much did he accomplish in terms of establishing rule of law and transparency and accountability of his government? As the chief executive of the government, he is evidently accountable for the deeds of any one "assisting" his government to establish good governance, which certainly he as well as all his fellow citizens expect any future government to emulate.

Last October it was reported in a number of media outlets that an invisible force assembled a number of BNP standing committee members in a house and forced them to form a committee which since then has been known as the "reformist" group of the party. A few of those members in a sworn affidavit submitted to the High Court stated that they were, in fact, forced by an invisible force to sign on the papers agreeing to the formation of the committee.

It has been reported in the media as well as alleged by leaders of pro-Khaleda BNP in the last few days that a few of their standing committee members have been detained (later released) and

threatened to withdraw their support from the pro-Khaleda faction of the party. Does any citizen of the republic want these activities to be emulated by the "assistants" of any future government?

The way the election of the SCBA (since then held) and the DUTA have been forced to postpone has no precedence during the tenure of any of our elected, military or quasi-military government.

Only on the other day, an illustrious bureaucrat, one of a few civilian decorated heroes of our great war of liberation, who became a household name in 1971, was rearrested after he was granted bail by the supreme court and released, on charges of making inflammatory speech at Panthpath after his release. The fact of the matter, as disclosed by his lawyer, that he never went to Panthpath, let alone made a speech, which he was never accustomed to making, since he was a bureaucrat, not a politician.

How the IG of police will explain the act of his officer when he hear him making repeated utterances that his forces are now working without any pressure from any quarter?

The objective behind the arrest of Sheikh Hasina and putting her hurriedly on trial, notwithstanding her multiple illnesses, is now very obvious at both home and abroad. The world-renowned weekly The Economist in its April

17 issue has rightfully echoed the reality when it said: "The army's main headache is Sheikh Hasina, whose party is widely expected to win the election. Her detention on corruption charges has made her more popular than ever."

I personally felt myself out of touch when I heard many of our compatriots clamouring for the separation of the judiciary from the executive branch. I only found my views resonating in the words of the octogenarian lawyer Barrister Rafiqul Huq. Before the separation of the judiciary, at least the High Court division of the Supreme Court had the independence if the honourable judges had the desire to avail it. But after the separation of the judiciary, as it appears, the independence of the High Court division, let alone the lower judiciary, apparently has been stripped off.

And after the recent verdict of the Appellate division that the court (that includes High Court) cannot grant bail to any one arrested under EPR, in the words of Barrister Rafiqul Huq, "it is the last nail on the coffin of human rights." As president, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed refused to sign a bill that forbade bail for the accused, passed by the parliament during the tenure of the last AL government.

In a seminar last August, the honourable chief justice while addressing the judges declared:



The chief adviser must ensure that his government's legacy is above question.

"Judges couldn't be compelled to work independently by enacting laws. It has to be in their culture. If a judge is not committed to work freely, law cannot make him or her independent."

Quite to the contrary, the nation has witnessed the curtailing of their freedom by staying or overturning most of the verdicts

handed down by judges of the High Court division by the Appellate division, thereby concentrating the whole authority/independence of the judiciary into the apex body.

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Rashida Muhiuddin -- my soft-spoken, elegant friend

This morning, it is the soft-spoken, elegant Rashida Muhiuddin who comes alive in the crevices of the soul. She was a proper lady. The thoughts in her ran a beautiful course. And they underlined the self-esteem she based her life on. And I miss her.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

IT was a declining afternoon back in 2001 when Rashida Muhiuddin called. "She sounded happy, to the point of being thrilled. Could I come over to her Sheraton office for tea? Within the next half hour I was there. She was radiant, with that serene beauty in her giving off a glow of contentment. She had just been nominated by the Awami League for a Jatiyo Sangsad seat in Muktagachha and in celebration wished to share the moment with her friends. I thought myself fortunate in being one of them.

For the next hour, we talked of her plans. She was going on leave from Sheraton, where she had headed the public relations department for years. She clearly looked forward to winning that seat in Parliament, but if she lost, she would be back at work where we sat talking. On the walls were a good number of photographs.

Rashida was in all of them, welcoming high profile visitors to the Sheraton over a period of years.

On that day, Rashida Muhiuddin seemed to be bursting with energy. In my heart, I hoped she would win, for she would make a good, enlightened, graceful presence in Parliament. As I stood up to leave, we shook hands and I told her I would do all I could to help her in her campaign. A certain kind of brilliance shone in her eyes. Before the week was out, I had prepared a piece on her for the newspaper I was working for at the time. I called it "My friend the candidate." She was happy. She called to say she was touched and indeed copies of the article had already gone up on walls in her constituency.

In the course of the campaign, she would call to say how encouraged she was at the popular response to her candidacy. Here was a young woman, urbane and

urbanised, who was busy creating her own niche in the rough and tumble of politics in rural Bangladesh. She was quickly overcoming opposition to her within the local Muktagachha Awami League and seemed headed for victory at the polls. In the event, she lost. Or was made to lose. It was a year of disaster, for her and for her party. Rashida was certain victory had been stolen from her and for a very long time could not bring herself to face the fact that her rival had triumphed, in however questionable a way, over her.

Rashida Muhiuddin's sadness took on a deeper hue when she realised she was not welcome at the Sheraton any more. Her party had slipped from being the government into being the opposition. Perhaps the new regime, in an act of malevolence, did not want her back at her old workplace? And perhaps the manage-



ment of the hotel, acutely conscious of the need not to arouse the ire of the new ruling class, did not wish to embarrass itself by asking Rashida back in? In those months of growing frustration, Rashida realised that the only way she could keep herself going was to stay in politics. It was often late in the day that she called, to tell me of the many frustrations she was going through. And yet, she said, she felt she owed it to her constituents to keep the faith they had reposed in her despite the fact that she had not made it to

Parliament.

Like any seasoned politician, she made it a point to visit Muktagachha on a regular basis and thereby earned enough respect and support to be regarded as her party's voice in the region. And then there was the night when she called, only for me to hear her sobbing at the end of the line. Recovering in a minute or so, she stunned me with the news that she had earlier in the day seen her brother buried. It was a situation where I had no words to comfort her. She hung up, but before she did so I told her I would keep in touch.

My early acquaintance with Rashida Muhiuddin came through watching her read the English news bulletins on Bangladesh Television. Then, sometime in July 1996, she and I found ourselves as part of a team previewing a documentary prepared by the new Awami League government elected to office a month earlier. That was our first meeting; and it was to be followed by many more. She was happy when I went off to London in early 1997 as media spokesperson at the Bangladesh High Commission. On regular

visits home, we would meet at her office. I would often wonder why the government could not place her in a position where she would be doing a lot more good for it and for the country.

I did not go to see my friend Rashida Muhiuddin after her death. I was not at her burial at the intellectuals' cemetery in Mirpur. But over these last few days I have thought of her, have prayed for her; and I have wondered why she had to go the way of all flesh so soon, so much before her time. The last time she spoke was when I called her on her mobile. She was busy at a meeting of her party workers in Muktagachha. This is a bad time to call, I told her. I promised to call later. She said she would call too. That was the last time we spoke to each other.

This morning, it is the soft-spoken, elegant Rashida Muhiuddin who comes alive in the crevices of the soul. She was a proper lady. The thoughts in her ran a beautiful course. And they underlined the self-esteem she based her life on. And I miss her.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

On missing the politicians

But how do we gauge the sentiment of the silent majority with respect to the present uncertain and uncomfortable conditions of many of our politicians, some of whom are living a life of exile in foreign countries? The religious amongst the people are likely to quote the famous Quranic verse which says that God bestows honour to whom He pleases, and humbles one to whom He pleases.

SYED REZAUL KARIM

TO miss someone, one has to be fond of someone. This is truism and it reflects the term endearment. This is based on the scale of positive relationship. But it is also possible not to miss someone on the basis of dislike, disgust, or revulsion. Here works a vicarious solace in not so missing someone. This relationship is based on negative emotions and unsavoury experiences. There is a third dimension to the relationship or mental connectivity. One can perfectly remain a "stoic" or a "cynic" in the philosophical sense and maintain a stoical or cynical frame of mind, distancing oneself from whatever happens to others. Where do our people stand on the trichotomous attitudinal scale? This question seems relevant with regard to the plight of our ubiquitous politicians in the present day dispensation.

No one will ever dispute that these are not the "best of times" for our politicians. Some may even argue that this is the "worst of times" for them. However we are yet to know the "worst of times" given the present administrative,

electoral, judicial and political processes. As Tagore once wondered: "Where is the end of the road, and what lies at the end?"

We, the plebeians, gawk in some amazement and with wondrous eyes, at the plight of the once high and mighty. We may sympathise with their sufferings. The people who are familiar with the sufferings of daily existence were suddenly awakened to the plight of the politicians who ruled the roost in the country. For them it is an experience, unheard or unseen in this country before. Do the people stand now on the scale of connectivity to their once political masters?

There are people, of course, who are party activists and hangers-on who thrived on the political activities of their respective parties. They must be missing the politicians. Some of them have lost their livelihood as they sustained themselves on political pillars that dispensed favours when in power and are now in limbo. They may definitely miss the political peers and patrons greatly. And it is quite understandable.

And there are those whose aspirations to be "leaders" in

through proximity to the party chief and party high ups by laying out their lavish outlays to buy the ticket for party nomination or hierarchy will surely miss their political mentors and backers. They are now quite uncertain as to their investment and in anguish they may look forward to the golden day of election, if it dawns. And there are those who contracted "deals," anticipated business prospects and share in the prospective lucrative government contracts under political tutelage. They may deeply sigh in disappointment when they see that such contracts as for Boeing aeroplanes in millions of dollars or licenses for VoIP etc under the Telecom Regulatory Commission are without any "middleman" or "commission agents" and absolutely free of political influence to alter the outcome. They may also miss their respective political peers and count on the uncertain days ahead with remonstrations to the present dispensation.

But how do we gauge the sentiment of the silent majority with respect to the present uncertain and uncomfortable conditions of many of our politicians, some of whom are living a life of exile in

foreign countries? The religious amongst the people are likely to quote the famous Quranic verse which says that God bestows honour to whom He pleases, and humbles one to whom He pleases. We find no system of articulating the sentiment of the great majority into expression when it relates to such an abstract concept as "fondness" or "missing." Therefore the sentiment remains ambiguous. Of course this ambiguity, can also be rooted into the people's experience of having led a life under the political dispensation before 1/11, which is not one of unmixed blessing. People may remember the chaotic, riotous situation that prevailed in the country prior to the Emergency Rule disrupting public life and peace. Can one for example, forget the awful audacity of a single person holding public office in Chittagong that threatened and then shut down Chittagong Port, the economic lifeline of the entire country, to the detriment of the life of people at large and damage to the national economy! Whom he was attempting to serve in the garb of a politician and in intoxication of party "supremacy"?

It was Aristotle, the Greek philosopher who called humans as "political animal." He warned about the undesirability of cultivating the extremes. He extolled the virtue of "polity" which means democracy. But he also mentioned about its negative aspect. A democracy can quickly turn into a mob rule, he maintained. The

parliamentary democracy that was practised in Bangladesh for the last fifteen years often got derailed by the willful acts of parties involved depriving people of the promised fruits of democratic rules and values. The people, in the end, were the losers. Did the politicians ever think that they will once live in such a predicament as it exists today?

Why do people remember some leaders fondly and use them as a reference? It must be said that politicians in our country are not all leaders. A leader may or may not be a politician but a politician is not always a leader. What then constitutes leadership, that tangible and intangible quality that distinguishes a person as the leader and sets him/her apart from the run of the mill politicians that now crowd on TV screens or on platforms?

While it may not be possible to measure the mental connectivity of the people with the politicians who lead them, it is possible to construct an idea of the politician the people would like to lead them. People need or feel the need of a leader who has a "vision" -- the people would like to move towards a shared dream with the leader and get a clear direction when such a direction is needed.

Was it not Martin Luther King in the USA who cried: "I have a dream" and walked with the millions to adhere to that dream. Was it not Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who declared in his thunderous voice: "The strug-

gle this time is for emancipation; the struggle this time is for independence" -- before the independence dawned.

People would like to see leaders who have the affiliative quality to create harmony by connecting people to each other. People expect their leaders to be democratic in their act and behaviour and value people's input and get their commitment through participation. Leaders are expected to be guided and helped by a motivated and competent group to meet the challenging tasks and achieve quality results. People would like to see their leader exuding confidence and soothing the fears of the people by giving clear direction in an emergency or national crisis. They would like to see the leaders listening and listening is a key strength in any democratic leader. A democratic leader is expected to build up on a triad of emotional intelligence abilities -- team-work, collaboration, conflict management and influence.

And above all, people of Bangladesh would like to see their leaders endowed with wisdom. The ancient Chinese sage and philosopher Confucius was once asked by his disciple what is wisdom. He answered: "Devote yourself to the proper demands of the people, respect the ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance -- this may be called wisdom." In Confucian times, "ghosts" and "spirits" meant religion.

Games begin early but nobody notices

NURY VITTACHI

CONTRARY to foreign devil media speculation, we are pleased to announce that absolutely everything related to the 2008 Olympic Games is going brilliantly well. As proof of this, we have decided to begin the games early.

Indeed, the first set of races has already been completed! This was the international leg of the Torch Relay, a complex tournament with each round involving six teams. The event works as follows.

Team one tries to carry a flaming torch through a city centre. Team two tries to intercept the torch. Team three stands on the side and shouts abuse at team two. Team four stands on the side and shouts abuse at Team one.

Teams five and six are news media. Team five makes news reports that are incredibly biased in favour of Team one. Team six makes news reports that are incredibly biased in favour of Team two.

We are pleased to report that the Torch Relay went so well that it has received more media coverage than any other event in Olympic history.

Now, here are the results. Team one, the torch bearers, received favourable reviews from judges in almost all cities. The exception was Hong Kong, where the local government selected its secret network of buddies in business and favoured political parties to act as torch bearers. Guys -- secret networks are supposed to be secret. That's the whole point! D'oh!

Team two, the torch interceptors, did some impressive stunts, climbing bridges and buildings, but lost points for a somewhat tenuous grasp of political history.

Teams three and four (the shouters of abuse) and teams five and six (the biased media) did their jobs very well, with the exception of the BBC, which accidentally produced balanced

reports. In this section, the silver went to CNN's Jack Cafferty for being biased and silly at the same time. And the gold went to CCTV for its brilliant ruse of pretending Teams two and four did not exist, thus misleading more viewers more comprehensively than any other media outlet in history. What a performance!

The 2008 Torch Relay garnered so much coverage that this game will almost definitely be repeated in the London Olympics in 2012.

But seriously, folks, I think anything that makes people discuss "sensitive" subjects and hear other points of view has got to be a good thing. And we mustn't let the political diatribes on either side distract us from the fact that is cool to have a big, world event here in Asia.

So, in an attempt to bring a smile back to the subject of the world's biggest sports event, I hereby present:

- The Top Ten Rejected Games for the Beijing Olympics:
- 10. Drunken javelin toss.
- 9. Silly-Westerner-speaking-Mandarin impressions.
- 8. Cross-country spitting.
- 7. Live seafood wrestling.
- 6. Armed dodge-ball.
- 5. Obese only child lifting.
- 4. Multiple foreign tourist fleeing.
- 3. Rapid street-side DVD selling.
- 2. Railway ticket window scam.
- 1. Egg and chopstick race.

Meanwhile, activists in China are giving interviews in which they explain that they are getting back at Tibetan separatists by boycotting a supermarket chain in China run by 40,000 Chinese people.

That's ridiculous. That's as illogical, as, say, America being attacked by people from Saudi Arabia and then deciding to take revenge by attacking a completely different country, such as -- to pick a place at random -- Iraq, for example.

Toss a javelin at our columnist by visiting www.vittachi.com