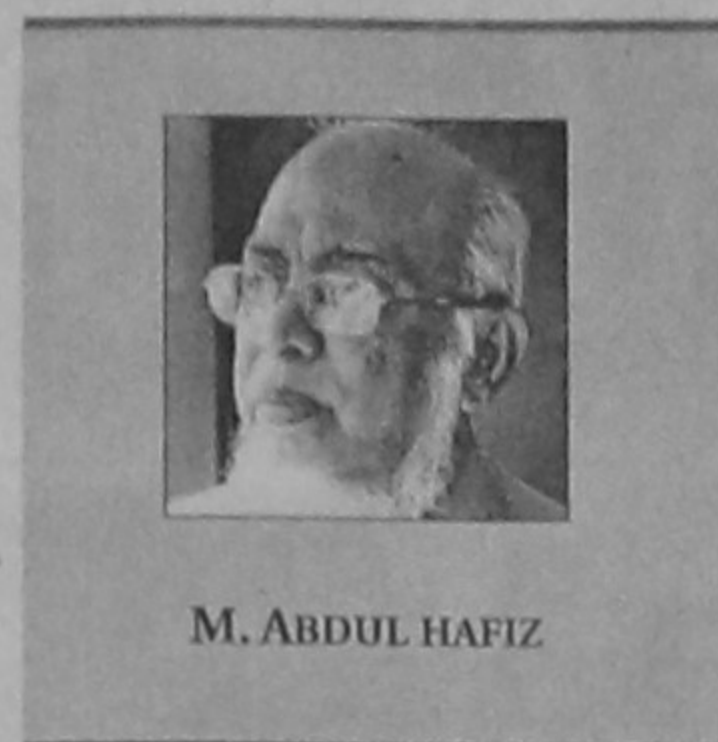


## The second coming of Khaleda Zia



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

### PERSPECTIVES

Surrounded by her flunkies, she has once again been holding court at the helm of her party hierarchy. In the process, she has been dispensing opprobrium to some while giving approbation to works carried out by the loyalists in her absence. The party minions, hustlers, and servile flatterers have also made a beeline to the Madam to ensure their place in the party or a slot in the future power structure.

ON January 11, 2007, Mrs. Khaleda Zia, the former prime minister ceased to be a credible name in Bangladesh politics, and the BNP-Jamaat alliance, the bastion of her power, also crumbled. She was universally condemned and booted all over the country as Bangladesh was virtually in ruins as a result of her alliance government's predatory rule.

In that milieu, the so-called Nationalist-Islamist forces also collapsed and eventually seemed to have petered away. Khaleda's clean legacy, if any, lay buried under the sleaze she had produced on all fronts of the government in the name of ruling this country.

But within less than two years, like the phoenix of ancient Greek mythology, to the consternation of the countless victims of her misrule and political vengeance, she has risen from the ashes. Thus, the alliance led by her has been celebrating -- disregarding the summer grapes of wrath.

For the most part of the year following 1/11, the Madam, as

she is also known, had remained ensconced in the cosy retreat of her garrison residence while a large number of her acolytes including her two sons were taken into custody, bringing great public relief.

But after about a year of incarceration, the Madam was released recently, presumably on the condition of her co-operation for holding the ensuing general election, hastening its process as a political stakeholder. It is an irony that the democracy she often tended to trample underfoot out of her authoritarian instinct came to her rescue by providing her political space anew.

Thanks to the inherent dynamics of democracy, even an outcast of the likes of Madam Zia has also been picked up from the abyss, given a fresh lease of life in politics, and elevated once again to the heights she deservedly lost. The question however remains if the Madam and her alliance are equal to the generosity shown by the authorities in rehabilitating them in national politics.

There are few positive signs. Prior to the release of the Madam and her prodigal son the nation witnessed a fresh wave of violence and vandalism perpetrated by the JCD student cadres who ominously raised their ugly heads and bared their fangs menacingly, signalling the return of their familiar brand of "nationalist" politics.

In the meantime, the Madam is back on form and on the top of things. Surrounded by her flunkies, she has once again been holding court at the helm of her party hierarchy. In the process, she has been dispensing approbation to some while giving approbation to works carried out by the loyalists in her absence. The party minions, hustlers, and servile flatterers have also made a beeline to the Madam to ensure their place in the party or a slot in the future power structure.

In an interesting circus now underway in the BNP, 1/11 is a forgotten episode and what led to it has been at least obfuscated. Madam Zia has no time to look back at the mess she left behind

and is more interested in the drama over her second coming.

She is rather in upbeat mood as her followers beholden to her jostle among themselves to pay afresh their fealty to her. She enjoys them vying with each other to touch her feet as a symbol of obeisance. The style and norm of her functioning have hardly changed.

When the flunkies resolved to make her the party chairperson for life she couldn't but relish it -- given the alacrity of a few contenders who questioned her authority to do this or that when she was in custody. She had to, however, humbly and graciously decline the offer when the party drew flak for the move from uncharitable critics.

All told, it seems business as usual for an indispensable leader of the country's powerful religious right, buttressed by its storm troopers, big business interests, and invisible string pullers. Ever the iron lady and the "uncompromising" leader, she is capable of overturning an applecart at the drop of the hat.



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/DRK NEWS

She has the least compunction for what she committed during her nightmarish rule between 2001 and 2006. It is as if she is above taking any lesson from those mundane things such as the persecution of political opposition and minorities, plunder of thousands of crores of takas during her party's tenure in power, and conspiring to recapture power on January 22, 2007 in

a scripted election -- to mention only a few.

These are things of the fossilised past! Who cares also what happened in the distant past when we are embroiled in an equally agonising experience today -- with the additional pique also of losing hope for anything better happening any time soon.

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

## Firm dates announced for elections

Time for political parties to fully cooperate

WITH the chief adviser to caretaker government announcing the timetable for the national election and upazila polls, the clock has been set ticking for a countdown to these much-awaited elections. After more than one and a half years of suspended animation, often clouded with suspicion and uncertainty, we are now in a position to exactly count in weeks and days the waiting time before the polls are held. The caretaker government and the Election Commission have deservedly earned plaudits as the political parties prepare themselves briskly for testing their strength among the electorate. All concerned have their job cut out.

The speech of the CA demonstrates flexibility on the part of the caretaker government to accommodate the demands of the political parties in order that the election is participated by all, and held in a free and fair manner.

There are plenty of reasons for the political parties to feel happy about the announcement of the JS and upazila poll dates. They have prevailed insofar as their main demand, of holding the upazila polls after the JS election, is concerned. It is for them to realise that the ball is now in their court, and that they should not create any roadblocks to the holding of the elections.

As for the upazila election, we find little merit in the reservation expressed by the two major parties about this being scheduled too close to the JS poll date. In fact they are on record saying that they would be willing to have the two elections simultaneously if necessary, but under no circumstances should the UZ polls precede the Sangsad election. We feel that their position has been vindicated.

One would agree that never have two polls at national level been scheduled so close to one another and, therefore, we would expect the election commission to employ all its resources to ensure that the two elections are held without any let, as per the dates announced.

We fail to see the need for insistence of the political parties on lifting of Emergency Power Rules before election. The CA has expressed his government's flexible approach in this regard. He has assured that the relevant provisions would be relaxed, and even repealed, at an appropriate time, to allow free electioneering activities. He should be taken at his words.

We do not see how the current arrangement can be a major impediment for the candidates in their electioneering. We have the recent example of city and municipal elections having been held under EPR, smoothly. There is the law and order factor that cannot be overlooked. Given that even during the emergency there had been occasional deterioration of law and order, of paramount importance should be the holding of a peaceful election.

## Carnage in Pakistan

Extremism must be defeated

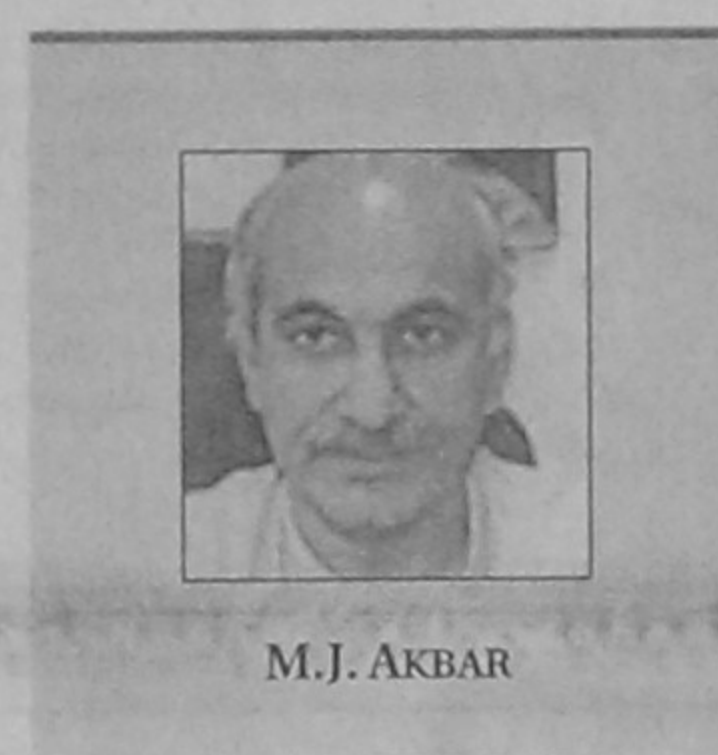
WE express our profound shock at the horror unleashed by a major explosion in the Marriott Hotel in Pakistan's capital Islamabad on Saturday. The carnage, apparently caused by a suicide bomber, has so far left over 40 people killed and scores injured and the hotel in ruins.

Pakistan has faced a series of bombings and similar attacks for more than a year at different areas, indicating how vulnerable the country had become to dastardly terrorist attacks. And as for Marriott, it has always been a high profile target on the list of the extremists where the foreigners frequented, and this time they have succeeded in carrying out the attack to cause maximum stir. The magnitude of the explosion and the precision with which it was detonated so close to a well-guarded hotel indicates that a highly trained group of extremists have operated from behind.

The attack came at a time when, ironically, in his inaugural speech to parliament, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari vowed to root out terrorism and extremism wherever they may try to surface in the country. Grave though it may sound, it appears that militants continue to pose serious danger to the stability in a populous country where they have numerous support bases and sympathisers. The recent strikes by the US forces on tribal areas on the soil of Pakistan accusing those to be new strongholds for Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants have also caused anti-west sentiments to flare up among the rank and file in the country. The people of Pakistan consider the act as infringement on their sovereignty, which might have provided the extremists with an excuse to exploit the situation.

The attacks on civilian targets by the militants are highly condemnable. It speaks volumes for the lack of scruples in materialising their agenda. These elements are veritably getting stronger everyday and their network is extending beyond the borders. Today it is Pakistan, tomorrow it may be any country in the region. Therefore, we should put our heads together to defeat terrorism. At such difficult times we express our empathy and solidarity with the people of Pakistan.

## Plants and implants



M.J. AKBAR

### BYLINE

The White House cited India's vote against Iran at the IAEA as evidence of a pro-US Indian tilt in conformity with the provisions of the Hyde Act. Under pressure from the United States and Israel, we have also abandoned the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, which would have provided much cheaper energy than nuclear power. Moreover, even in the event of the abrogation of the treaty by the United States, the mandatory inspections of India's nuclear facilities will continue in perpetuity.

YOU never know what you can pick up from the shambles of a large edifice, and little could be larger than the financial architecture of American capitalism. Here is a nugget from Tom Friedman's column as he talks about America's energy planning and the economy.

His particular reference is to Republican candidate John McCain's idea that nuclear plants can meet America's energy needs. Friedman writes: "McCain talks about how he would build dozens of nuclear power plants. Oh, really? They go for \$10 billion a pop. Where is the money going to come from?"

Good question. An American columnist is convinced that nuclear energy is too extravagant for an economy as rich as America's, but Dr. Manmohan Singh insists on foisting it on the Indian taxpayer.

To put the comparison in perspective, the combined value of three major American companies that collapsed in the last fortnight

was more than India's GDP.

As each deception is exposed, the goalposts keep changing. Now that people are becoming aware that even in thirty years nuclear energy will not contribute more than six or seven percent to the energy mix, at prohibitive cost, a new fudge is in the works. Another energy plan will be formulated to increase, on paper, the share of nuclear energy. As for the cost, let those in charge in 2020 worry.

Former prime minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh has been asking the government for clarity on the cost to the consumer of this nuclear energy. He has yet to get a satisfactory answer.

Almost every argument used by the government to sell the nuclear deal has been upturned by revelations. Dr. PK. Iyengar, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, summed up the American position in a statement on September 4: "If India conducts a nuclear test, America will immediately abrogate the

123 Agreement and take back all nuclear materials, including fuel, it has supplied; there are no guarantees of perpetual fuel supply or provisions to stock for lifetime; there will be no transfer of sensitive nuclear technology such as reprocessing technology; the US does not consider the 123 Agreement as the only document governing civil nuclear cooperation with India -- its actions will also be dictated by the provisions of the Atomic Energy Act and the Hyde Act."

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facilities will continue in perpetuity.

When such details became public, Delhi argued that we could always ignore Washington and buy from countries like France. On the evening of September 18 the French ambassador to India, Jerome Bonnanfont, clarified that the proposed Indo-French nuclear agreement is going to be on par with the American agreement -- there will be no transfer of enrichment and reprocessing technologies to India.

The Times of India printed this pithy comment: "Certainly, it's a blow to all those who trumpeted that if the US wasn't prepared to give things, let's go to the French."

Some long-time supporters of the nuclear deal, who accepted Delhi's assurances about the negotiating process on good faith, like former Indian ambassador to Washington Lalit Mansingh, have now advised Prime Minister Singh greater caution before committing the nation.

## Someone tell the Obama campaign that Barack is black

### LETTER FROM AMERICA

Unless Obama is ahead by at least 7 points, he is not going to win. The Obama campaign sometimes forgets that he is not like any other Democratic nominee. He is black, and to win must minimise his blackness. To reassure whites he must surround himself with whites at all times. Obama must campaign with white Democrats such as Bill and Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden by his side.

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

UP until this week, the Republican Party had been successful in defining the 2008 presidential election as a contest not of the past versus the future, the Democrats versus the Republicans, but between Barack Obama and John McCain.

Their logic was brilliant. As long as the Americans were asked to choose between a white "war hero" and a black of questionable (suspicious!) heritage, surely they were going to choose wisely!

It is common knowledge that as long as the election is a referendum on Obama, he is going to lose; if it is about issues, Republicans will lose. Rick Davis, McCain campaign manager, had proudly boasted that this election was not going to be about issues, it was going to be about personalities.

The Republicans attempted to separate Obama from his own party. Obama is not running for president on his own. He is the nominee of the Democratic Party, the party with the largest number of registered Americans. The whole Democratic Party

establishment is behind him. The Republican strategy was to fool Americans into believing that they were being asked to hand over the country not to the Democratic Party and its nominee, but to this dubious black man!

Republicans are confident that Americans are fools who will believe anything they are told.

Unfortunately for the Republicans, the catastrophe in Wall Street this week forced John McCain to talk about something he dreads, the economy. He is on record as saying that he does not understand the economy.

As Lehman Brothers went bankrupt, insurance giant AIG required an \$85 billion government bailout, and the government planned a half-trillion dollar infusion to steady the economy, McCain boasted that the "economy's fundamentals are sound."

Obama and the Democrats pounced on the gaffe and reminded the voters that the deregulation that McCain championed was responsible for the indiscretion of the Wall Street fat-cats.

Reacting to McCain's claim that he's going to take on the "old boys' network," Obama pointed out that several former lobbyists now work on the McCain campaign. "The old boys' network?" Barack asked, "In the McCain campaign, that's called a staff meeting." Such attacks, sarcasm and humour seem to be working. For the first time in two weeks, Obama is once again leading in the polls.

Although the New York Times/CBS and Gallup tracking

poll has Obama ahead by 5 points nationally, the poll of polls has him ahead by 2.

The poll also showed that the net result of the "Palin effect" is that more white women now support Obama than did before, and that 75% of Americans believe that McCain picked Palin not for her competence but to help him win.

Alarmed by the drop in the polls, McCain responded the only way he knows -- with racist ads. McCain ran an ad with sinister images of two black men, (Obama and former Fannie Mae chairman Frank Raines) followed by one of a vulnerable-looking elderly white woman.

The ad calls Raines "Obama's principal economic advisor," another white lie. Frank Raines put out a statement: "I am not an advisor to Barack Obama, nor have I provided his campaign with advice on housing or economic matters."

Republicans will continue running the ad. The idea behind the ad is to alarm white women

in swing states into thinking that black men will steal their wealth.

The writer has commented before in this column that the Republicans will run an out and out racist campaign against Obama. Blacks are not Republicans' constituents; they do not court blacks, nor care if they feel insulted.

Polls show that only 36% of white males, the enlightened ones, will vote for Obama. Republicans use the fact that over 90% of the blacks will vote for Obama as a rallying cry. But the fact is blacks have voted for whites all their lives. 90% of the blacks voted for Bill Clinton, Al Gore and John Kerry. However, blacks are faulted by the Republicans for voting as overwhelmingly for a black man! The racist ads are aimed at the white males to whip up white nationalism.

Obama cannot be complacent. Only now is he beginning to feel the full venom of the McCain sting. He has to keep attacking McCain and remember the Bradley effect -- many

whites say they will vote for a black candidate, but in the privacy of the voting booth do not. Unless Obama is ahead by at least 7 points, he is not going to win.

The Obama campaign sometimes forgets that he is not like any other Democratic nominee. He is black, and to win must minimise his blackness. To reassure whites he must surround himself with whites at all times. Obama must campaign with white Democrats such as Bill and Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden by his side.

The first presidential debate on Friday, September 26 is absolutely critical for Obama. McCain is ruthlessly persistent even when he lies. He likes to talk down to his opponents with put downs such as "you should not have done that."

How Obama responds to such insults will be crucial. He must not let McCain get away with racist comments such as "you showed me disrespect." Obama should needle McCain, who has

a fierce temper.

McCain is downright mean when he is angry. If Obama can get under McCain's skin and make him lose his cool, Obama will win the debate. However, if Obama is too verbose and McCain succinct, McCain will win.

A white colleague once told me why whites fear blacks. "We did so much injustice to them that if they ever acquire power, they will exact revenge," he said. Maybe this is the message the Republicans are telegraphing to white Americans.

Of course, this is as ridiculous as the KKK's propaganda during the 1960s civil rights movement that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had keys to the bedroom of every white woman in America! But the Republicans have a penchant for winning by peddling the absurd and the ridiculous.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a Rhodes Scholar and Daily Star columnist.