

# Will crying wolf restore credibility of BNP?

Crying wolf only tarnishes the dignity of the nation and wrongly exposes its vulnerability. It will never help to restore the credibility of the party that was squarely responsible for making Bangladesh a dysfunctional state. Do the people want to go back to that dark era?

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

**B**NP chairperson and the leader of the opposition in parliament came down heavily on the government, accusing it of implementing the agenda of its "foreign masters." In tune with her earlier utterances, she said: "This government assumed office by digital manipulation.... My party will not sit idle if the Awami League (AL) government does not refrain from conspiracies against the country, making the country a client state." Even the last caretaker government, which came because of the AL and allies' movement against the BNP and its allies' effort to hold a voterless election, did not escape her wrath.

Because of her belief that the people of the country could be fooled by this rhetoric, she adopted the slogan "save the people, save the country" in the last general election. However, not many people at home and abroad, except for a few diehard anti-AL (not pro BNP) columnists in only a couple of news dailies, subscribed to her preposterous accusations.

It was widely believed that "one eleven" would make a qualitative change in the future politics of Bangladesh. However, the BNP chairperson's utterances and actions do not show that any lesson has at all been learned. After her smashing election debacle, it was

expected that she would do some soul-searching and rebuild her party as an alternate positive political force, which sensible people could feel allegiance to without destroying their consciences. She needed some friends of the party, not foes.

Her statement that "foreign powers" brought the AL-alliance to power is an insult to the free will of our people, so vociferously expressed in the December 29, 2008 election. As the leader of the opposition, she has the legal right to criticise the actions of the government, but as each day passes by, the stories of wanton looting and rifling of the national exchequer, arm smuggling, money laundering, holding of fat foreign bank accounts and encroachment of others' properties by her near and dear ones, it is becoming morally difficult for her to criticise the wrong-doings of the six-month old government. When she speaks publicly, the faces all around her are either convicts or accused people.

She has tried to politically resurrect a person who has damaged the most sacred institution of the Westminster democracy, the speaker's position, by robbing the national exchequer. Her party's secretary general took air conditioners, furniture etc. from his official residence to his personal one, and rice and other food items from the canteen of the parliament in addition to misappropriating lakhs of

takas from the parliamentary allocations. It became the biggest joke when he responded that the allegations were made to tarnish the image of his family, when the deeds and misdeeds of his two sons are well known.

Keeping him as a spokesman for the party cannot help to restore the acceptability of the party to the people. How will the BNP chairperson explain to the people how her elder son Tarique Rahman got a waiver of interest worth Tk 12 crore on bank loans within a week after the BNP-Jamaat coalition assumed power in 2001? In any civilised democracy, that action alone would be enough to seal the political fate of a former PM for good.

The BNP chairperson alleged that a "conspiracy is on to make Bangladesh a failed and non-functional state." Ironically, the characterisation of Bangladesh as a "failed state" surfaced only during the dark era of the last BNP-Jamaat government. Bangladesh was ranked 17 in the global ranking of failed states by an American magazine named Foreign Policy in 2005. Bangladesh was termed as "the most dysfunctional country in Asia" by the Asia Times in its issue on April 15, 2004. The Wall Street Journal and the Heritage Foundation in their report (2005) on Bangladesh said: "Weak rule of law... manifesting itself in some of the world's worst official corruption, civil crime, and political violence... continues to burden Bangladesh's democracy." It added: "Until the government addresses Bangladesh's many structural weaknesses, there is little reason for optimism about the country's future." These are not pleasant citations on the part anyone who wants to see Bangladesh as a modern, democratic and secular state with its rightful place in the community of nations.

Quite to the contrary, the news media



Where do you go from here?

around the world, by and large, dubbed the last election as the most fair in Bangladesh's history and the election victory of AL and its allies as a reflection of optimism. The Toronto Star, the most circulated and influential news daily of Canada wrote (January 1, 2009) in an

editorial entitled "Optimism in Bangladesh:" "Bangladesh attracts little attention beyond its perennial cyclones and floods. But a political hurricane swept through the South Asian nation this week that has cleared the path to a secular democracy -- and set back the

march of radical Islamists." About the fairness of the election, it went on: "The result, in a campaign remarkably free of the violence and vote-rigging that plagued past ballots, was decisive: In a landslide, Hasina's secularists captured 230 of 300 seats in Parliament. Zia's BNP was reduced to a rump of 27 seats." The editorial concluded with a tone of optimism: "At a time when the West is wringing its hands over the encroachment of political Islam, the world's second-biggest Muslim nation has shown its commitment to democracy and the resilience of a moderate Islam that renounces violence. That Bangladesh is following the lead of Indonesia -- the world's most populous Muslim-majority state -- in embracing liberal democracy is further grounds for optimism, and a welcome counterpoint to the growing power of the mullahs in nearby Pakistan."

The BNP chief further alleged that "the country is passing through a bad time because of a conspiracy against its independence and sovereignty." In today's global village, if linking Bangladesh to the proposed Asian Highway means encroachment on her sovereignty, then no state in Europe is sovereign and neither America nor Canada is sovereign a country. The geographical sovereignty of a nation of 150 million people can never be encroached upon. It is more so for the nation than sacrificed 3 million of her sons to gain the sovereignty. Crying wolf only tarnishes the dignity of the nation and wrongly exposes its vulnerability. It will never help to restore the credibility of the party that was squarely responsible for making Bangladesh a dysfunctional state. Do the people want to go back to that dark era?

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## The Afghan boomerang

What is the Northern Alliance doing today? Who is funding, equipping and guiding the Taliban uprising in north-western Pakistan. These Taliban have extended their control in many areas and are now fighting hard to retain control of Malakand Division. Who is helping them is the question.

M.B. NAQVI

**T**HE time and place to locate the Afghan trouble is Vietnam in the early 1970s. The Vietnam War was not going well for the US, and defeat seemed likely. It was then decided that the west would have to retaliate against the east somewhere.

The west selected Afghanistan. Pakistan and Iran were available to assist. Although there were agreements that Afghanistan be left as a neutral buffer between two superpowers, the west decided to breach this understanding in retaliation against Russian success in Vietnam. The local satraps of the west, the Shah of Iran and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, were

enthusiastic pro-American rulers. Bhutto had revived Cento and held the largest ever exercise off Karachi port.

The western design began with the realisation that while democracy and western values could not easily defeat Communism's appeal, maybe the Muslims' God, His Prophet and the faith could if pitted against the Communists' acolytes in Afghanistan.

The starting gambit was to entice Sardar Muhammad Daud, who rode to power with the support of Afghan communists. It seemed as if Afghanistan would become a western success. But it was in breach of the old understandings between the superpowers. Afghanistan was one of the weakest spot in Russia's soft underbelly and strategically a gateway to Central Asia. Hence it was chosen.

While the west collected money, bought equipment, arranged logistics and organised the war, Bhutto's ISI and the Saudis provided highly motivated but irregular warriors. The Mujahideen's indoctrination was founded on the strong local faith of Deobandi Islam, to which were added bits of Salafi and Wahabi faith and opinions. This proved enough to conquer Afghanistan.

It was a long hard job, and took almost a decade. But the west did win. Why the Russians went out of Afghanistan unconditionally has remained unexplained to this day. Could it be that the Americans had promised not to integrate Afghanistan into the western power system? But nothing definite is known.

The game began by the two satraps of the west enticing Sardar Daud with promises by the west of developing Afghanistan with a \$2 billion loan from the Shah. Some \$200 million are said to have been disbursed. Daud happily agreed to cross over to the west. But he asked for time before he put any signatures on paper.

He wanted to liquidate the commu-

nists parties -- Khalq and Parcham -- which had supported him and had recently become united. He held a special secret enclave where the liquidation of communists was being planned.

As the meeting proceeded it looked as if the Communists knew what was being discussed. In the end they preempted Sardar Daud by killing him first, and took over Kabul. The west was furious and started a war against the PDPA regime.

The west won the victory early in 1989. The Soviets withdrew unconditionally after signing the Geneva accords. It appears that the US too notionally withdrew in terms of 1907 agreements between Britain and Russia that ended the Great Game as it was called.

It laid down the rules of the game for the control of Asia. They divided Asia at the latitude passing through Tehran: The Russians would not cross that line southward and the west promised not to move into what became areas under Soviet influence.

These understandings survived the 1917 Revolution in Russia and the passing of leadership of the west to America in 1946. In theory, the understandings are being observed even today, though there is a bit of confusion about Afghanistan and now Pakistan. Afghanistan had indeed dissolved itself into many civil wars.

The first Afghan civil war broke out in 1993, one and a half years after the formation of the seven-party Islamic government that Pakistan had fashioned and installed -- after which the Pakistan PM offered thanksgiving prayers in the Grand Mosque of Kabul.

The second time was after Pakistan succeeded in helping re-establish order over 80% of Afghanistan -- leaving only the northern strip to be ruled by warlords belonging to, or aligned with, the seven Afghanistan religious parties. Pakistan helped establish Taliban regime that the US drove away after

9/11. The US is still establishing some order under Karzai, though the outlook remains grim.

Pakistanis did two things in the 1990s: they had another go at Afghanistan under a new design. A new version of Mujahideen was created, which was even more extreme, more violent and more obscurantist than the 1980s version. Everyone knows what the Taliban regime did in Afghanistan. Only Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan recognised them.

Second, it utilised the old Mujahideen and some other Islamic zealots belonging to various Pakistani religious parties and sent to Kashmir for a jihad against India. This, too, lasted about a decade or a little more. India had a hard time for just over a decade. But under the threat of invasion, India did obtain a promise from Pakistan to "not allow any territory under its control to be used against India."

For Afghanistan, they produced a new version of Mujahideen called Taliban in 1994. Under the guidance of ISI, the Taliban occupied 80 percent of Afghanistan by 1996 and helped form a Caliphate. Pakistan thus became a suzerain over Afghanistan while a Taliban government ruled in Kabul for five years. This was largely due to the Shah of Iran having been overthrown by an Iranian revolution led by the clergy.

The Taliban government was a Caliphate that all Muslims were required to support. But, on the whole, the Taliban regime remained within the sphere of western power and influence.

The question now is: what has Northern Alliance been doing since 1996? The Taliban left the northern areas severely alone, to be ruled by what was called Northern Alliance. It was a rule made by warlords with connections to the original seven religious parties of Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance was left severely alone for some mysterious reasons. Why?

The Taliban would not have left them alone. They must have done so under Pakistani influence, which, in its turn, must have taken its cue from America. Anyway Northern Alliance is said to have been supported by Iran, India and Russia. It is therefore possible that the Americans stayed off that area because of the same old Russo-British rules of the game, amending it for Afghanistan.

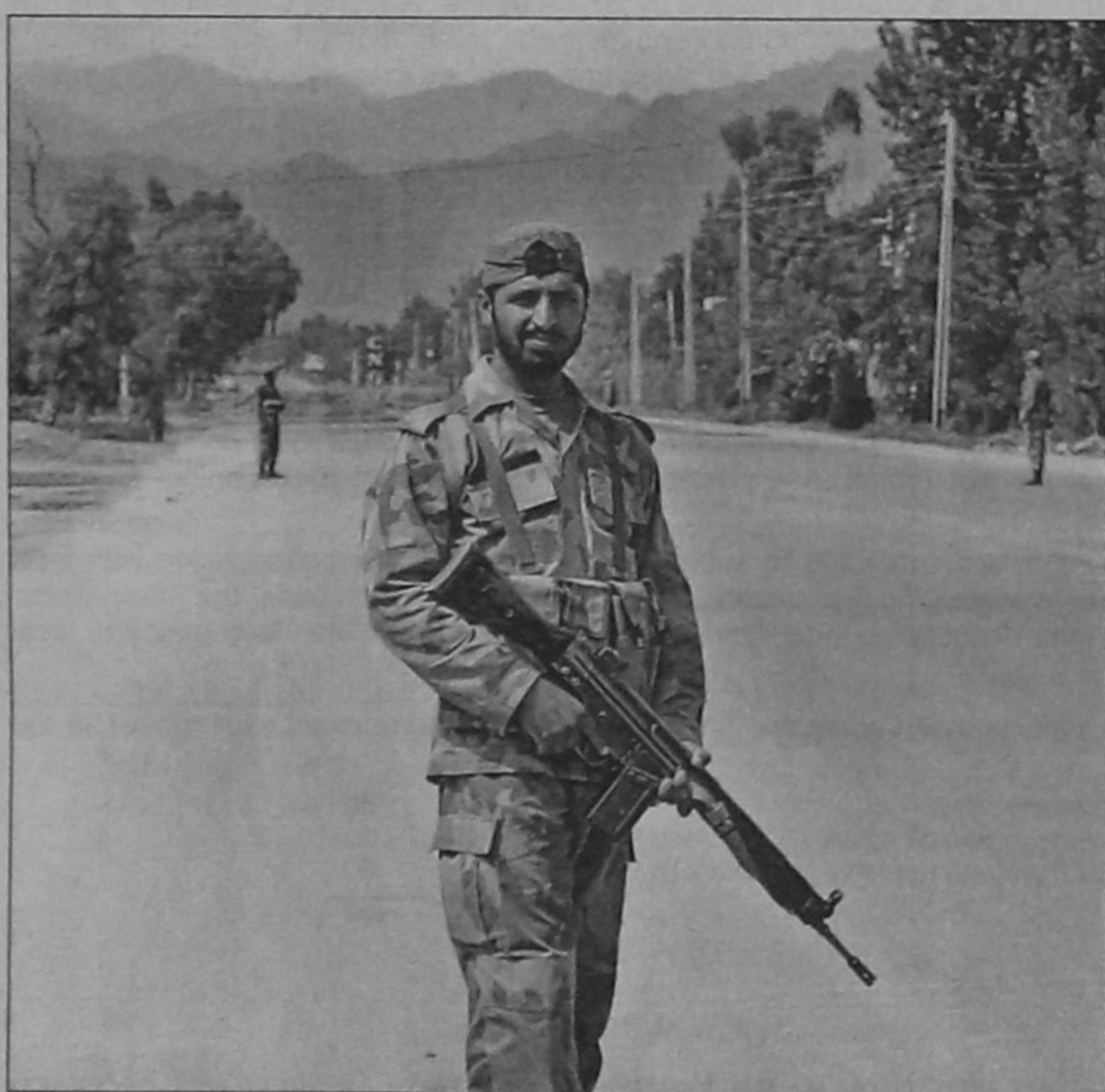
But how could Northern Alliance stay quiet and do nothing? It is logical that they would try to harm and hurt both the Taliban and their patron, Pakistan. Have they done anything of the kind?

After 9/11 the US invaded Afghanistan and drove the Taliban into Pakistani Balochistan. Taliban did return to Pakistan but got into Afghanistan as insurgents for fighting the US, ISAF and Nato forces. They look like eventually winning over the Karzai regime led by western forces.

One mystery remains. What is the Northern Alliance doing today? Who is funding, equipping and guiding the Taliban uprising in north-western Pakistan. These Taliban have extended their control in many areas of Federally Administered Tribal Areas and are now fighting hard to retain control of Malakand Division. Who is helping them is the question.

The Taliban are fighting the Pakistan army in a way that cannot be done without big support from outside. Neither Pakistanis nor Americans talk about it. Why? If outsiders are supporting them, as maybe likely, why are the Americans tolerating Iranians, Indians and Russians harming what once a western bastion: Pakistan. Could it be that some new rules of the game are being written, or have these been agreed upon? The two big powers are not in the front, and those in front are India and Iran. But, anyway, the original jihad has in fact boomeranged mainly on Pakistan.

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As you sow, so you reap.

## Losers: The new winners



**T**HERE is probably no better guiding principle in life today than "Loser takes all." Remember, children, it's not winning the game that counts, nor is it how you play the game: what's important is to lose as spectacularly as possible. You see, losers are the new winners. This

sounds like nonsense, and quite possibly is, given who is saying it, but consider the evidence.

Singer Susan Boyle has been all over the world's newspapers again recently. Why? Because she lost a talent contest. There wasn't a single photo of the winners in any paper I read. No, Ms Boyle was pipped at the post and her prize was massive global news coverage, plus US\$1.6 million in fees and a recording contract.

Did the people who won the talent show get a recording contract? No they did not. Okay, so they're a dance group, and no one wants to listen to a

CD of people shuffling around a stage, but my point remains.

This is the age of irony. If you want to make it big, losing should be your goal. There are many examples, which prove this. In the fight for the role of spiritual leader of Tibet, the loser, technically, is the Dalai Lama. His prize? He has become one of the top celebrities on the planet. And the winner? No one knows anything about the guy. I bet even his mother gets up in the morning and says, "Just remind me, who are you?" He replies: "Hi, mom, I am the government-installed puppet spiritual leader of Tibet." His

mother says: "Oh yeah, that's right, now take out the garbage."

Ask people around the world to name the leader of Malaysia, and the best answer you'll get is: "Er, a Malaysian guy?" But ask them to name the loser, and they'll say: "It's that Anwar dude, who allegedly beat himself to a pulp in prison." No one can forget that.

Two weeks ago, a woman named Carrie Prejean lost the Miss America contest after saying: "I think marriage should be between a man and a woman." This is the sort of statement that Westerners find shockingly outra-

geous and Easterners find amazingly obvious, and neatly illustrates why the two sides will simply never understand each other. Loser Miss Prejean is now world famous. The winner was a woman named, er, I can't remember. You can't either, right?

Jennifer Hudson lost the battle for American Idol. Her prize: a fortune, a record deal, and an Oscar. Sportsman Eddie "the Eagle" Edwards did so badly in the 1988 Winter Olympics that he became the world's most famous ski jumper.

I could give examples forever, but happily for all concerned I am reading

the end of this space, so I shall do what all good columnists do and jump to conclusions. Winning is passé. It's obvious. It's predictable. It's elitist. And it's also extremely difficult.

Choosing to lose, on the other hand, is a brave decision. It is different. It is innovative. It is contrarian. And, most importantly, it's way, way easier. That's why I've chosen to be a loser. Think about it. It might just work for you.

You could end up just like me. (Take that as a warning.)

For more on losers AKA new winners, visit our columnist at [www.vittachi.com](http://www.vittachi.com).