

Sheikh Hasina's call to Khaleda Zia

Boycotting parliament amounts to abandoning voters

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday urged Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia, through Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Abdul Hamid, to return to parliament with her party. We wish, and so does the country, that Khaleda Zia had reassured the nation through an emphatic yes. But that was too much to expect from a single gesture of goodwill; yet, the big question is: why should the Bangladesh Nationalist Party have boycotted the JS for such an inordinately long time, doing neither any good to the party nor to the country?

We think that boycott of parliament is never justified and it is even much less so at the moment, given the mounting nature of challenges facing the nation. This newspaper has been asserting for years on end that the JS is the supreme repository of popular expectations and aspirations and therefore does not belong exclusively to the ruling party or the opposition. Indeed, it is the House of the people, and home to both the opposition and ruling party since between themselves they speak for the entire nation.

Our exhortations, it is obvious, have fallen on deaf ears as political parties (and they have always been in the opposition) have repeatedly boycotted parliament -- in the seventh, eighth and now the ninth Jatiya Sangsad. We will not rake up the past today. But we must say that the on-going boycott of the JS by the opposition BNP cannot be justified, even remotely, because of the fact that no serious or earth-shaking issues are there to compel it to stay away from the House. The long-drawn wrangle that the BNP has been engaged in with the ruling party on a flimsy matter like seating arrangements not only makes a mockery of politics but also sends out a very wrong message to its constituents across the country. The party has clearly chosen to ignore the fact that it has a responsibility to its voters, that it must speak for them in parliament.

We think the time is here and now for Begum Zia and her party to rethink their position and go back to the Jatiya Sangsad. A boycott on flimsy pretexts undermines not only the public image of a party but also threatens the future of democracy. There are established parliamentary conventions and procedures that allow parties and members ample scope to raise any and all manner of issues on the floor of the House. If the BNP is concerned about the time it is allotted in the House as also other issues, it can easily put the Speaker to the test by seeing whether he lives up to his reassurances to it in the JS.

A relentless boycott of parliament, a spectacle we have been witnessing since the revival of democracy in 1991, is not only a waste of time for the country but also puts the nation in a state of fatigue. Every party, be it in power or in opposition, must remember that public aspirations are all and always focused on the JS. We therefore once again urge the BNP to return to parliament, for that is the only surefire way in which the JS can be strengthened and for democracy to strike deeper roots in Bangladesh.

Denial of crossfire deaths

Refuting a fact causes loss of credibility

WE do not want to quote figures - even one death is one too many if that occurs due to abridgment of the due process of law. But so called crossfire has put a blot in the country's image, not to speak of the fact that public confidence, in the government and in those that people seek protection of, has been eroded badly and the credibility of some ministers severely dented.

The matter causes a degree of outrage when ministers try to justify crossfire killings, as was done by the shipping minister some time ago, and creates indignation when none other than the home minister the custodian of law and order herself goes about denying that there have been any crossfire deaths during the tenure of the present government. This is travesty of truth.

We wonder what has compelled the home minister to refute something that is patently obvious to even the most uninformed. What drives her to say what she has? The least that she can do is elaborate on her statement which has been a dismal attempt to refute the killings, because, to the rest of us the denial mode of the government is all but starkly clear. From her position she is expected to make responsible utterances, especially in sensitive matters.

We are afraid we cannot accept the explanation that the killings are a result of firefights between the miscreants and the security agencies. While no one can contest the right of any individual to self defense, least of all the security agencies, who do indeed lay themselves open to attacks in their line of duty, the manner of the deaths, and the stories that are banded in every case are so similar and repetitive that do great injustice to the intellect of the public.

We would like to restate that extra-judicial killings by the law enforcing agencies put severe strain on the rule of law besides exposing the government's lack of faith in the legal system. Nothing can be more damaging to the idea of good governance when those that are entrusted to deliver it, themselves act against it. If criminals exploit the loopholes in the system to escape justice it is for the government to take steps to plug the gaps.

We would like to remind the government of its election pledge in respect of extra judicial killings and stress on the fact that adoption of unlawful means is certainly not the way to ensure the rule of law.

The great redemption

It was against this backdrop that the whole nation waited with bated breath to hear the verdict of the Supreme Court on the Bangabandhu murder. To the great relief of the nation, the earlier verdict was upheld by the Appellate Division of the apex court, vindicating the victory of the truth. It was redemption of the rule of the law in the country at long last.

M. ABDUL HAFIZ

NOTWITHSTANDING his controversial experimentation with one-party Baksal rule it was Bangabandhu who gambled with his life to bring us independence and metamorphosed the course of the history of the people of Bangladesh in a fundamental way. In the process, he couldn't but clash with the vested interests, who were dislodged from their entrenched position of privilege. In the invisible war between the two in post-liberation Bangladesh the ire of the defeated elements of 1971 fell squarely on Bangabandhu and AL. The first full blast of that ire and the opening shots of the salvo aimed at the AL could be heard in the wee

hours of August 15, 1975, when Bangabandhu, the nation's founding father, fell to the self-proclaimed assassins' bullets. With near precision the marauders mowed down the slain hero's entire family, missing his two daughters.

After that brutal assassination, the course of justice was blocked by the grotesque Indemnity Ordinance. When this roadblock was removed more than two decades later, the dispensation of justice then moved into a judicial tangle. Yet it goes to the credit of AL that they stuck to the highest standard of judicial procedure instead of resorting to summary disposal of the case, which would be easier and quicker.

With the surgical operation of August 15 the schemers expected that, because of the

awe of the gruesome killings enacted by them, the rest of the AL leadership would simply cower in submission and its top leaders would fall in line with the conspirators. Their expectation was partially fulfilled, with the bulk of the AL leadership capitulating. The four defiant ones were, however, brutally killed later in their cells in Dhaka Central Jail. Again the perpetrators of the heinous crime went scot-free.

Justice is a universal right, which was sadly denied in the aftermath of that gory chapter of our history. The rule of the law that had been taught by the British, and which we ourselves developed an enviable tradition of pursuing, was made a burlesque of itself. When justice flounders or is even delayed it is, in the parlance of the judiciary, the denial of justice. And for the last thirty-four years we did live in darkness.

Meantime, the denial of justice and absence of the rule of the law took tremendous toll. With no deterrent to stop the criminals, crimes grew beyond any proportion. The whole polity and society were left in the hands of hardened goons and criminals. Also the faith in justice and even belief in noble human instincts started eroding.

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Law and order, observers say, has improved somewhat -- thanks to renewed alacrity of the law enforcing agencies -- but again at a cost. There is also a new spate of extra-judicial killings in the now infamous "crossfire." It will be our misfortune if our home minister denies its existence when we are rejoicing over the Supreme Court verdict, calling it a step towards enforcing rule of law in the country. The public is not a bunch of morons who do not understand the subtle violations of the rule of law occurring in the country almost everyday. If not now, the myriad injustices meted out to the weak and ordinary people can produce a backlash at some point of time, and our complacency over the considered verdict of the apex court will be bereft of its significance. The country will continue to be shorn of justice and fair-play unless we can guard against the travesty of democratic rule and criminalisation of politics that are surreptitiously seeping into our body politics.

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Why can't men simply wear blindfolds?

What that means is a pathetic thing. Women have to bundle up so that men can stay footloose. Women have to disappear behind their clothes, but there's no dress code for the roving eyes of men. Why can't men simply wear blindfolds? The same old story. They want to rule.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

LUBNA Hussein is a 34-year-old Sudanese journalist, who is now famous for wearing pants. She was arrested last July along with 12 other women from a Khartoum café, charged with violation of Sudan's decency law. All of these ladies were found guilty of wearing pants.

Lubna's friends pleaded guilty and took 40 lashes each, carried out with plastic whips that leave permanent scars. But she refused to plead guilty as charged. An angry court sentenced her to flogging no matter what.

On her court day, she invited fellow journalists to watch her ordeal. Hundreds of Sudanese women wearing pants swarmed in front of the court. But the trial would be twice postponed before the sentence was commuted from flogging to incarceration. In between the court tried to realize a fine of USD300 from Lubna in lieu of one month in prison.

Defiant Lubna refused to pay the fine and

went to jail. Her decision made her an instant celebrity abroad. She would be showered with effusive epithets. Some newspapers hailed her as "the trouser lady". Others called her "Rosa Parks in Khartoum".

That alone couldn't be news in a world where cruelty to women is nothing new. But if history is reworded by six centuries, then this news should get us worried. In 1431, another woman was vilified for wearing pants. Joan of Arc was burned at the stake for heresy, one component of that accusation being that she wore pants like a man inside prison. During her trial, Joan tried to defend her position.

She informed the court that there was sexual assault on her inside the prison and explained that she wore two layers of pants attached securely to the doublet with twenty fastenings to safeguard her against future attempts. The court ignored her words and condemned her to death; her body burned twice more to reduce it to ashes. In 1920, Joan of Rouen would be canonized, and made a patron saint of France.

Nobody says Lubna of Khartoum is on her way to sainthood. But her persecution raises some interesting questions. Is it sheer coincidence that what happened in Rouen six centuries ago should be repeated in Khartoum? How is it possible that two women from two different centuries and two different continents should be targeted for the same silly reason?

In other words, one thing hasn't changed between the Middle Ages and the modern days. Man's inexhaustible desire to dominate others has remained the same. He wants to control his dog, if not his woman, if not his family, if not his country. He's the same control freak, the same deterministic animal. He wants others to conform to his standards, no less now than ever before.

From conquests to conferences, that's one thing, which may have become more sophisticated, but not eliminated. From the art of killing to the art of dealing, man's indomitable ambition to rule over others has been justified in many forms. From theology to ideology, means have changed but not the end.

In his bid for supremacy, man has shifted his goalpost. He has ruled in the name of religion, revolution and reason. He has ruled by the power of nature. He has ruled as God's vicar. He has ruled by people power. He has changed with challenge, and adjusted with ambition. He has done what it takes to cling to power.

Once upon a time, man believed that the

sun revolved around the earth. Once upon a time man believed that outside education for women was prohibited by religion. Some people still believe that getting up on the wrong side of the bed brought bad luck. In Africa, certain tribes are afraid that each time one is photographed, it peels off a layer of one's life. These are examples of how belief of one generation runs the risk of bringing comic relief to another.

Does God bother what man wears, because he sends him naked? The Neanderthal man invented clothing, which turned out to be more than cover for naked bodies. The concept of proper attire grew out of need to dress up for different vocations and different occasions. People wanted to look good in their clothing. They introduced fashion.

Why are women restricted from wearing a certain dress? The reason is that it can't protect them from the lustful gaze of men. A woman is required to cover her head, hairs, ears, neck and chest. In fact, she has to wear the covers for the eyes of men.

What that means is a pathetic thing. Women have to bundle up so that men can stay footloose. Women have to disappear behind their clothes, but there's no dress code for the roving eyes of men. Why can't men simply wear blindfolds? The same old story. They want to rule.

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Significance of Armed Forces Day

Members of the armed forces in those days had left behind giant footprints for the future generations. They have left lessons, which we have to follow.

MOHD. HANIF

NOVEMBER 21, 1971, a glorious day of our national history: On this day combined forces of Bangladesh army, navy and air force launched a concerted effort to put down the occupation army of Pakistan on the wake of unprecedented genocide conducted by them. On this very day armed forces of Bangladesh took a ceremonious birth. Although November 21, 1971 is marked to be the raising day of the Bangladesh armed forces, the Bengali members of army, navy and air force conducted operations in their respective domains against the occupation forces from March 26, 1971. These organs of the armed forces had been carrying out massive destruction of the occupation forces during the liberation war without any pragmatic national directives and military planning. As a matter of fact in the tense situation of our national life in those days when occupation forces were committing inhuman atrocities all over East Pakistan, the armed forces of Bangladesh came into being to confront the occupation forces.

A deliberate attack by the armed forces of Bangladesh was launched on the Pakistani forces on November 21, 1971. The war gained ferocity from the outset. Large areas along the border were being liberated every day. Within a few days lines of communication were disrupted in the face of undaunted attack by the combined forces. The defenders were routed. All their munitions of war, their morale, their organizational setup, fight

worthiness, everything collapsed. And as a result of such helpless situation the occupation forces surrendered. The armed forces of Bangladesh played a vital role in liberating the country from occupation forces.

The following brigade forces were formed by the Bengali members of army:

- 'Z' Force: This force consisted of 1, 3 and 8 East Bengal Regiments. Major (Later Lieutenant General) Ziaur Rahman was the commander of this force. It was raised at the foot hill of Tura hill, opposite to Mymensingh.
- 'K' Force: Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Khaled Mosharraf was the commander of this force. This force raised at Agartala with 4, 9 and 10 East Bengla Regiments.
- 'S' Force: 'S' force was raised at Hezamara, opposite to Sylhet with 2 and 11 East Bengal Regiments. Lieutenant Colonel (Later Major General) Shafiullah was the commander of this force.

Besides the brigade force, the whole geographical area of Bangladesh was divided and placed under 11 sectors for carrying out effective operations on the occupation forces.

It was essential to prevent supply of arms/ammunitions and rations for the occupation forces from West Pakistan in sea routes. Hence, a naval commando consisting of Bengali naval representatives was formed. Due to the massive operations by this naval commando, use of Chittagong and Mongla port including other river ports became hazardous for the occupation forces. The naval commando destroyed many Pakistani ships.



The sentinels of freedom

Thus, the supply of the occupation forces from West Pakistan came to an end; as a matter of fact, the then East Pakistan became totally segregated from West Pakistan.

It is essential to have air support for the success of any battle. The Bangladesh Air Force started its function from an abandoned airfield at Dimapur inside deep forest of Nagaland. 24 airmen were imparted training here. They took part with army and navy in various operations.

The peace-loving people of the then East Pakistan were forced into an armed struggle by Pakistani forces on the night of March 25, 1971. Even an hour before the attack was launched, the Bengali soldiers never knew that they were to encounter Pakistani forces and fight a total war. They never conceived that the Pakistan army would be so brutal in killing the Bengalis. When the political situation was moving fast towards an

armed revolution and then a total war, Bengali soldiers stationed in East Pakistan with Pakistan army units could not gain or convey information to decide their course of action. The victories, which had been achieved during the liberation war in different sectors, were the outcome of November 21, 1971. Members of the armed forces in those days had left behind giant footprints for the future generations. They have left lessons, which we have to follow. Their dreams would be fulfilled on the day when the Bengali nation as a whole become satisfied with what they want to see for themselves as an independent nation. On November 21, every year, oath is taken fresh by the members of the Bangladesh armed forces that they would stand beside the nation as 1971 in case of any national disaster.

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