

Khaleda Zia's Sylhet speech

Our comments on two of her points

KHALEDA Zia has promised the youth that they would be handed over county's leadership if her party wins the next general election.

This is a very welcome step forward in grooming the young generation of the nation to come forward and take leadership. There is also no alternative to this, if we as a people want to take the nation forward and catch up with the rest of the world in all spheres of development. And that is more so at a time when we are mired not only in a national crisis, but also one of global proportions.

We would appreciate, if the opposition leader as well as her party leaders and workers begin to work in earnest to imbue the younger generation with higher ideals of selflessness, morality and patriotism as opposed to prevailing practice of naked philistinism. We would take her words seriously if she would make clear that it is NOT her son that she has in mind when talking about handing over power to the young. We remember Hawa Bhaban with all its "young" members. We also recall how her son had appointed "young" state or deputy ministers who were instrumental in immobilising their seniors, and how these "young" leaders influenced Khaleda Zia's own government, including incidents like the 21st August killings.

At the Sylhet rally, she also demanded release of some leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, one of her alliance partners. Unfortunately, she did not stop there, she even dragged the issue of trial of crimes against humanity and genocide perpetrated on Bengalee people to equate it with the excesses by the Rakkhi Bahini during the post-independent government. How Rakkhi Bahini excesses could be bracketed with crimes against humanity is beyond our comprehension.

Our own laptop

Make wider use possible

WITHIN a week, the first Bangladeshi assembled laptop and netbooks known as Doel will be on the market. The company Telephone Shilpa Sagstha (TSS), a public company is manufacturing the products. So far, there is one model of laptop and three models of netbooks, their costs varying from Takas 10,000 to 26,000. At the moment, 90% of the equipment for the devises are imported but within six months, this figure will drop down to 40%.

The goal of the government in launching such a product is that computers and technology can be more easily affordable for people. These laptops and netbooks were originally destined to be supplied to the public service sector, particularly to government educational institutions but due to a lack of instant demand, it has decided to sell them to private customers.

This is indeed a great achievement in the domain of technological advancement and the intent to equip government schools was a very forward thinking and useful one. However, some very important factors needed to be considered.

Firstly, even though the price range is quite reasonable for a mobile computer generally speaking, it is still a large budget for many in the country. Secondly, it not only a question of having the purchasing power for the device itself. What is also required is a significant power supply and a wifi connection (wireless system of connection to the internet), without which a portable computer is simply a typing devise. These aspects drive up the cost of electricity consumption significantly.

Despite the fact that there were no demands from government schools, a program to popularize and provide laptops and netbooks to selected schools for students whose families could not otherwise provide for their children to be technologically educated could have been a much more useful endeavor in the creation of a

BARE FACTS



M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

government (CTG), she said emphatically that the Election Commission (EC) would be reconstituted and strengthened through discussions with all stakeholders, including BNP, to ensure free and fair elections.

There have been mixed reactions to the PM's statement. The BNP-led opposition has rejected it and asked for reinstatement of the CTG system abolished by the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in June. Civil society leaders and the media have opined that the CTG system is necessary to prevent rigging in the polls, and they expressed fear that the country's democratic system may be under serious threat if the stand-off between the government and the main opposition continues. They have, however, welcomed the PM's announcement regarding reconstitution and strengthening of the EC.

The PM's announcement followed the demand made by the leader of the opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for a neutral EC at a grand rally organised by the BNP-led four-party alliance on September 27 in the capital. Khaleda Zia said: "A caretaker government and a neutral EC are a must for acceptable polls. In the absence of those, we won't take part in the election" (The Daily Star, September 28).

While welcoming the opposition

ALTHOUGH Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently (October 1) ruled out the possibility of holding the next general election under a caretaker

leader's proposal for reconstitution of the EC through consensus, the PM urged the BNP to place its demands, including the one on the interim government, in the parliament.

Some people argue that BNP will not respond to the PM's call to sit across the table to discuss reconstitution of the EC on the following grounds:

- The opposition leader has asked for fulfillment of two demands: one, reinstatement of the CTG system; and two, a neutral EC. How can BNP agree to sit with the government to discuss reconstitution of the EC when its main demand for reinstatement of the

The draft law on appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and other election commissioners prepared by the EC pursuant to Article 118 of the Constitution can be the basis for discussion between the government and the opposition for reconstituting and strengthening the EC.

CTG system remains ignored?

- BNP believes that the PM has, in fact, made the announcement to put pressure on it;

- The opposition finds it difficult to have confidence in the premier's announcement because of the CTG issue. The PM is on record as telling the special parliamentary committee on constitutional amendments for retention of the CTG system. Then she changed her mind and scrapped the CTG system by bringing about the 15th Amendment to the Constitution. The opposition thinks that the government will not pay heed to the suggestions made by it for

reconstitution of the EC. The proposal for sitting across the table to discuss the matter is simply a ploy to discredit the opposition.

It is true that the above arguments are not without merit. But it is also equally true that the CTG and the reconstitution of the EC are two separate issues. BNP can respond to the PM's call without compromising its position on CTG system. BNP knows well how a partisan EC can influence the results of the elections.

A report published in the daily Ittefaq of October 10 says that Speaker Abdul Hamid suggested that talks between the government and the

and the opposition for reconstituting and strengthening the EC. On the invitation of the EC, all the registered political parties -- except BNP -- civil society leaders, editors and senior journalist have already discussed the draft law with the EC.

The BNP reportedly refused to discuss the draft law with the outgoing EC. Excepting the ruling AL, all others who attended the meetings with the EC have given their views and suggestions on the draft law. Both the ruling AL and the opposition BNP can now discuss and finalise the draft law for enactment by the parliament. After enactment of the law, the process for reconstitution of the EC should be started following the criteria in the law, keeping in view that the tenure of the current EC expires in February, 2012.

Enactment of a law to regulate the appointment of the CEC and election commissioners is necessary because in the absence of such a law during the past forty years of independence, the appointments have been at the pleasure of the government. Successive governments have generally appointed persons loyal to them as CEC and election commissioners to serve their cause, particularly to influence the general elections to the parliament.

To conclude, BNP has nothing to lose by responding to the PM's call to sit with the government for discussing reconstitution and strengthening of the EC. Rather this will raise the image of BNP in the eyes of the people. Who knows that BNP will not be benefited most from a reconstituted neutral EC in the next general election of members of parliament?

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WORLD SIGHT DAY-2011

Eye care in Bangladesh

M. NURUN NABI

GLOBALLY, every 5 seconds one person goes blind and every minute one child goes blind. In the face of such an alarming situation, World Sight Day is observed every year to focus attention on the issue of avoidable blindness and vision impairment. It is the primary advocacy event for Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, a global effort to prevent blindness undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).

According to WHO statistics approximately 314 million people in the world are visually impaired, of whom 45 million are totally blind. 153 million people are visually impaired due to uncorrected refractive errors (near-sightedness, far-sightedness, or astigmatism). The majority of these individuals could have normal vision restored with eyeglasses, contact

lenses, or refractive surgery. Over 85% of visually impaired people live in low- and middle-income countries. 79% of all blindness is due to age-related cataract, the leading cause of blindness. Cataract surgery and the correction of refractive errors are

among the most cost-effective health interventions.

The WHO statistics also say that age-related causes of visual impairment and blindness are increasing, as is blindness due to uncontrolled diabetes. Blindness caused by infectious diseases is decreasing globally, due to public health action. Blinding trachoma affects 40 million people today, compared to 360 million in 1985.

Approximately 1.4 million children under age 15 are blind, yet approximately half of all childhood blindness can be avoided by treating diseases early and by correcting abnormalities such as cataract and glaucoma at birth.

It is a matter of concern that 80% of the visually impaired persons live in rural areas where the treatment facilities are very poor as 90% of the doctors and paramedics are urban-based.

In Bangladesh more than 750,000 people are blind among 30+ population, of which 80% are due to cataract.

According to official estimate, approximately 120,000 cataract patients are added every year. Over 6 million people in Bangladesh need vision correction by spectacles and other means. Approximately 150,000 irreversible blind require rehabilitation. There are about 40,000 visually impaired

women and children in Bangladesh, of whom an estimated 12,000 have cataract.

It is a matter of concern that 80% of the visually impaired persons live in rural areas where the treatment facilities are very poor as 90% of the doctors and paramedics are urban-based.

The government is working to achieve goals set under Vision 2020. The National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital is coordinating the overall activities at national level. There are separate eye care units in all medical collage hospitals and district level general hospitals.

A large number of hospitals in the private and non-government sectors and many international organisations are working to address avoidable blindness in the country and supporting the government in the development of eye care sector.

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REMEMBRANCE

Obaidul Haq: renaissance man

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

HE was the quintessential good man. In Obaidul Huq, there was that beauteous image of a scholar and a journalist working in happy fusion. He was, if you must know, part of that company of men in whom subsisted an old-fashioned fascination for values together with a powerful presence of an understanding of realities. And we call that combination, that individual, in terms of the literary, a rounded personality. Huq was truly that, perhaps much more.

That is why we recall him, even as we inform ourselves that perhaps he should have lived longer. But he did live long, longer than many of us will or can or should. He missed out on being a centenarian by a mere four years. In those ninety six years, he proved to all of us, in nearly every region of life, that he belonged in that rare company of the wise in whose voice history found apt representation. There were the faces he recalled, the lives he remembered, the stories he had heard and the tales that he shaped in his inimitable way. Obaidul Huq was, in many more ways than one, fundamentally a union of personalities within the ambience of a single individual. He wrote fiction, of a standard that may have gone miss-

ing in these more banal of times. Think back on his novel Sangram, a tale that in time was recreated on celluloid. And speaking of the pioneering role he played in the development of movies in our part of the world, there is always that poignant point of reference, the story he called Dukkhe Jaader Jibon Gorha. If you have something of history working in you, you will know the ache that drove him to this exposure of human agony. It was pre-partition India. It was a gory spectacle of men bludgeoning men to death in a wicked demonstration of communalism. Huq was speaking for a generation that had lived, indeed was living, through some of the more macabre moments in time.

There was the perfectly civil in Obaidul Huq's attitude to life, to people around him. Experience for him was a whole wide world of pathos and laughter, of light and shadow. As a journalist, he never lost sight of his mission --- that it was to inform and enlighten, through an objective presentation of news and a dispassionate serving up of opinion. A clear sense of history, in his view, was a necessary appendage to an understanding of the world, of what lay beyond it. He admired heroic men. His observations on Bangabandhu, through the essays he penned as A Leader With A Difference, were proof of that historicity in him.

And then there was the abundance of wit in the man. It was coruscating, it was enlivening, it was invigorating. Those who heard him relate all the old anecdotes, the tales which made people double over with laughter, came away educated with an intensity you do not see in many around you. Obaidul Huq was a natural. He laughed at life even as he shed tears over its varied themes of tragic intent. He observed the world through a prism that took in light before sending out light of its own.

That is why Obaidul Huq remains a tall presence in our lives. In the passing of the seasons, it is his wisdom that leaves us dreaming of a future that could yet be, of a past that will never be a present, ever again. Huq was our renaissance man.

(Obaidul Huq, eminent journalist, movie maker, novelist and raconteur, died on 13 October 2007.)



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❀ THIS DAY IN HISTORY ❀

October 13

54

Nero ascends to the Roman throne.

1332

Rinchinbal Khan, Emperor Ningzong of Yuan becomes the Khagan of the Mongols and Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, reigning for only 53 days.

1884

Greenwich, in London, England, is established as Universal Time meridian of longitude.

1918

Mehmed Talat Pasha and the Young Turk (C.U.P.) ministry resign and sign an armistice, ending Ottoman participation in World War I.

1923

Ankara replaces Istanbul as the capital of Turkey.

1943

World War II: The new government of Italy sides with the Allies and declares war on Germany.

1990

End of the Lebanese Civil War. Syrian forces launch an attack on the free areas of Lebanon removing General Michel Aoun from the presidential palace.

1999

The United States Senate rejects ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).