

GROUND REALITIES

We congratulate Suu Kyi on her historic victory

World watchful over pace of democratic reform

LIKE the rest of the world, perhaps a little more so as her next-door neighbour, we take heart in Myanmar's first landmark step on what looks like still a long road to democracy.

In the backdrop of a semi-civilian rule, set up with appointment of ministers drawn from parliament members inducted through 2010 elections, 45 seats fell vacant necessitating bye-elections offering space to Aung San Suu Kyi.

Consequently, Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) captured 40 of the 45 seats on offer. Suu Kyi forced to languish under house arrest and political wilderness since 1990 has emerged victorious to take her place in parliament with other elected MPs from NLD. In a 664-member parliament, NLD constitutes not even 10 percent of the legislature. Thus, for the present, the Suu Kyi factor is symbolic in parliament, albeit significant in its own right.

The real significance of her victory is to be measured in terms of unleashing positive energy among the people to aspire for more than rationed or gradualist transition to democracy. The general election scheduled for 2015 provides a testing ground for political parties to transit to democracy by wresting it from military hands conclusively. Suu Kyi's charisma can be a powerful catalyst for such a change.

The initial post-election sentiments from Suu Kyi speak of her realistic approach to the unfolding scenario as she said that the goal now was 'reconciliation with other parties'. She is also wedded to the cause of ethnic minorities as part of a national reconciliation process.

The challenges facing Myanmar are still formidable. Politicians are locked up behind bars, violence against ethnic minorities continues and military dominance over state institutions remains. But if military keeps levers to itself, Suu Kyi has people's power behind her and the western world's leverage for democracy is being exercised through sanctions.

Even the semi-civilian rule has opened up business and investment opportunities in the once-closed Myanmar economy. China has been already in business and other countries are queuing up to invest in Myanmar. The process set afoot seems irreversible. Can full democracy be denied to Myanmar for long?

Politics hinders education at CU

Uphold sanctity of the campus

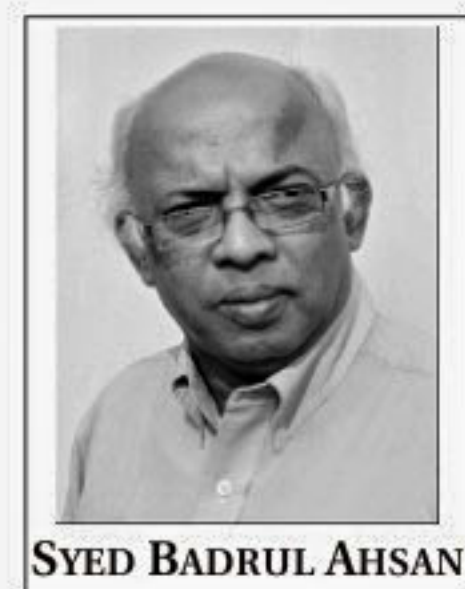
IT is with deep shock that we read the news item highlighting the ordeals of general students at the Chittagong University. In the past two years university authorities suspended classes for no less than 151 days due to violent clashes between politically backed students organizations. In the last instance in February this year, two students were killed following a clash between Bangladesh Chhatra League and Islami Chhatra Shibir and the authorities put off all classes and examinations for 37 days. A university which should have been an ideal place for learning through free exchange of thoughts has thus been subjected to a tug of war between different students' organizations, leaving the general students at their mercy.

The serene atmosphere of Chittagong University, being surrounded by green hills and thickly planted trees should have been ideal for intellectual pursuit. It ought to have infused the spirit of tolerance in students who come here to pursue their dreams. But when the power-hungry students' groups lock themselves in fights which often turn fatal, they sully the sacred ground of the university, showing complete disregard for the purpose they had entered its portals.

We are also shocked to find out that the authority has yet to mete out punishment to any of the culprits who were involved in the incident. We demand the authorities' immediate intervention to stop clashes as well as bring all accused in previous cases to trial. We also urge them to make the central student's union functional so that competent students can lead and involve students with creative, social and cultural activities.

It is truly disheartening to know that a large number of teachers are also involved in politics rather than in research and intensive teaching activities. Instead of assuming the role of a torchbearer, some of them exert influence over students' groups. If teachers are not in constant pursuit of knowledge; if they do not open new frontiers in advancing the society, then how will their students

Of the ugly and the indecent



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE prime minister is not the only one who is worried about the use of indecent language in parliament.

We all are. When not so long ago two women lawmakers from the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party went for an indecent assault on the person and reputation of Sheikh Hasina, it was a whole nation that was left reeling from the shock thus engendered. Here we were, at home with our children and grandchildren, watching the proceedings on television. Those two women left us with red faces before our families. It was the eyes of the children that said it all. Is this politics? That was the question they seemed to ask. And we had no answer but a load of shame to offer them in response.

The prime minister is aggrieved and so are we. And yet this concern on the part of the head of government ought to have come when, a fortnight or so before the BNP women's indecency exposed itself on the floor of the House, it was a woman lawmaker of the ruling Awami League who inaugurated the whole process of bad manners being part of political culture when she unleashed a tirade against former prime minister Khaleda Zia. She questioned Begum Zia's character; she raised questions about the paternity of her children. We wished then the earth would crack open and swallow us all. More galling was the fact that the deputy speaker of the Jatiyo Sangsad, who happened to be presiding over the session, made no effort to bring that bad-mouthing lawmaker to heel. He even gave her an extra few minutes to tear Begum Zia's reputation to shreds.

It is all rather painful, all this continuity of indecency in the House. You do not expect members of parliament to be uncouth, to go down to a use of plain gutter language. Any MP who does so should have his or her membership suspended or even cancelled. Neither, however, seems to be happening in Bangladesh. A few years ago, when the BNP was in office, one of its lawmakers, given the opportunity to express himself on the budget, clearly lost his head and began to heap abuse on Sheikh Hasina and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The speaker at the time did what the deputy speaker in

to write the foreword to Kayani's book, Not the Whole Truth. In the old days, you see, political rivalry did not translate into personal enmity. Good behaviour mattered.

And good behaviour, indeed morality, has patently gone out the window. Ignore the fact of Begum Zia's birthday being a matter of national scrutiny. But what you cannot, must not ignore is the reality of what she and her followers do on August 15 every year. We do not choose to argue that Begum Zia was born on August 15, but we do take issue with her when on a day when a whole nation recalls the Father of the Nation -- because he and his

be happening, you say. The circumstances ought to have been quite something else, especially when you remind yourself that not everyone else is like this judge. That moment of surprise passes and then you inform yourself that such is what truly should be happening around us, that good men and women should be stepping out of their homes to teach us through precept and practice.

An absence of good manners is a sign of the rise of little men in our society. When a respected figure in Bangladesh takes it upon himself to assure the prime minister that she could end up getting the Nobel Prize in two years if she does a good job, you have a simple question for him: does the country or the prime minister need his advice? Likewise, when another well-known figure decides to enlighten us on a new truth -- that this nation went to war for freedom and not at the call of any particular individual, he makes us question his sense of history. He is wrong. And he is wrong because this nation did wage war for liberty at the call of one man and only one man. That man, just in case anyone is inclined to forget, is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

It is a strange country. Men who have served military dictators today strive to be the conscience keepers of our society. Women who know nothing of politics end up polluting parliament with the foul odour spewed by their language. The leader of the opposition, too angry to remain in parliament unless it is that ninety-day matter of renewing her and her party's hold on membership of the legislature, turns her back to the prime minister and stalks off as soon as the latter takes the floor.

That spectacle is not exactly edifying.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.

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these times has done: he enjoyed the lawmaker's demonstration of ugly manners. We are not quite sure how many lawmakers felt embarrassed about the wicked behaviour of their colleague. But we do know it was citizens across the board who nearly died from shame.

Sit back and reflect awhile on the systematic decline in manners and mannerisms in diverse areas of life in Bangladesh. Reflect too on an era -- and that is fundamentally the 1960s and early 1970s -- when Bengalis were noted for their cultural sophistication and political secularism. And not just Bengalis. In the old Pakistan, Justice M.R. Kayani took constant potshots at Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, and rightly too, in his writings and lectures. And yet that was no reason for Pakistan's first military ruler not

family were murdered on the day -- the former prime minister opts for a public celebration of her birthday. Doesn't she feel sad on that day? Doesn't she remember the kindness heaped on her by Bangabandhu in her younger days? Doesn't she realise that it is in sheer bad taste to celebrate her birthday, in public, when we recall the old anguish which wound itself into our lives on August 15, 1975?

In all these years, morality has taken a beating. It is hard to find decent men and women around us any more, but when some decent people are spotted, we are left surprised. Why are they yet decent? Why does a sense of morality yet underpin their lives? A judge of the High Court has declined the offer of an upgrading of his seat on Bangladesh Biman. This should not

N-bomb and terrorists

GWYNNE DYER

WE have just had the second Nuclear Security Summit, in Seoul. It got surprisingly little attention from the international media although 53 countries attended it. For the media, nuclear weapons are yesterday's issue because nobody expects a nuclear war. But a nuclear weapon in terrorist hands is the defining nightmare of the post-9/11 decade, and that's what the summit was actually about.

"It would not take much, just a handful or so of these (nuclear) materials, to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent people, and that's not an exaggeration," said President Barack Obama on his way home from Seoul. "There are still too many bad actors in search of these dangerous materials, and these dangerous materials are still vulnerable in too many places."

Keeping bomb-grade nuclear material out of the wrong hands requires a high level of international cooperation. Some progress was made on this issue in Seoul, in terms of coordinating police and intelligence operations, but the real problem is that there are far too many nuclear weapons in the world.

Nobody has ever come up with a plausible scenario in which a terrorist group creates a nuclear bomb from scratch. Mining uranium, refining it to weapons-grade material, and constructing a bomb that will actually produce even a 20-kiloton explosion (like the

Hiroshima bomb) are tasks that require the scientific, technical and financial resources of a state.

What terrorists need is a ready-made bomb, or at least enough highly enriched uranium or plutonium that the only job left is to assemble the bomb. The only plausible source of a terrorist bomb, therefore, is the nuclear weapons programmes of the various states that own them. And the bigger those

1984 Reagan said: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in (the US and the Soviet Union) possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?" Obama seems to share the same goal, but his support for "Global Zero" is more nuanced.

From a high of 65,000 active

bringing the old peace movement along for the ride. (And why would they complain? The essence of any political strategy is finding partners to ride with you at least part of the way to your destination.)

However, to get Russia to sign up to a mere 1,000 nuclear weapons, Obama will have to give up on ballistic missile defence. The Russians are hugely inferior to the Americans militarily by every other measure, so they cherish their nuclear parity. Effective US missile defences, if they could ever be made to work, would fatally undermine that parity.

Of course they never have been made to work reliably, even though the United States has deployed them in a couple of places. But the Russians have a childlike faith in (or rather, fear of) American technological prowess, so ballistic missile defence systems have to go.

Abandoning them would involve Obama in an immense battle with the Republican right, and he's not going to start that battle in an election year. But that is what President Obama and Dmitri Medvedev, the outgoing Russian president, were really talking about in Seoul when they were caught on an open mike.

Obama told Medvedev: "On all these issues, but particularly missile defense, this can be solved but it's important for [incoming Russian president Vladimir Putin] to give me space. This is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility." And so he may.

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programmes are, the greater the chance that either a nuclear weapon or a large amount of fissile material will fall into the wrong hands.

Now, it may be true (or it may not) that the US nuclear weapons establishment is so efficient and experienced that there is little risk of anybody stealing American bombs or fissile material. But American security also depends on everybody else's nuclear establishments being well protected -- and this explains why Obama is a strong supporter of the "Global Zero" project.

No other US president except Ronald Reagan has called for a world with zero nuclear weapons. In

nuclear weapons in 1985, the world's stock has declined to about 8,000 active warheads now, 95% of them under Russian or American control.

There are an additional 14,000 nuclear weapons in storage, all of them Russian or American -- and those may be an even greater danger for nuclear terrorism, since they are not under hourly supervision.

So getting the number of active nuclear weapons in American and Russian hands down to 1,000 each, and dismantling all of the "reserve" and stockpiled weapons, is probably Obama's real goal. The "Global Zero" rhetoric is mainly useful for

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 4

- 1147** First historical record of Moscow.
- 1721** Sir Robert Walpole enters office as the first Prime Minister of the United Kingdom under King George I.
- 1814** Napoleon abdicates for the first time.
- 1939** Faisal II becomes King of Iraq.
- 1949** Twelve nations sign the North Atlantic Treaty creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
- 1968** Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated by James Earl Ray at a motel in Memphis, Tennessee.
- 1976** Prince Norodom Sihanouk resigns as leader of Cambodia and is placed under house arrest.
- 1979** President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan is executed.