

SUNDAY POUCH

Home minister's exhortations to Jubo League

We commend the reply

THE newly appointed home minister seems to have gone overboard. Is it his overenthusiasm to prove himself or simply injudiciousness we do not know? But his asking the Jubo League (JL) to put up resistance against JI elements on Friday is, perhaps, the most thoughtless, callow and indeed highly provocative statement to have come from the mouth of a minister. The statement has caused us surprise, horror and revulsion.

At a meeting organised on Friday by the Jubo Sangram Parishad to, according to the organisers, "resist the Jamat-e-Islami (JI) terror and disruptive behaviour" the home minister called upon the youth wing of the party to resist the JI cadres and the non-secular forces wherever they were found to be indulging in destructive activities, and to hand them over to the police.

A home minister calling upon his party's youth cadre to act as vigilantes is unprecedented, and coming from a bureaucrat-turned-minister who, we feel, has more to be feared than other citizens, his call is to take law in one's own hand and is a recipe for anarchy. In his rashness the home minister has failed to realise the grave consequences of his remarks if it is taken seriously. We are happy that it has not been.

We are relieved that his call was summarily dismissed by those it was meant for. If the minister's exhortations to his youth cadre to go after the JI caused us shock we are pleasantly surprised by the sane and rational reaction of the JL chairman. It is indeed not the job of party cadres to go after political opponents or the trouble makers and the disruptive elements. It is the job of the government agencies to anticipate and forestall potential trouble and troublemakers, without causing impediments to the life of peace-loving citizens. These agencies are being maintained with public money to do exactly these jobs to ensure public order and safety.

We abhor JI disruptive politics as much as of any other political party's. But the job of tackling these problems cannot be outsourced, even more so to a student affiliate of a political party, without serious misgivings. We expect ministers to display better political sense.

Polytechnic institutes in bad health

Disservice to technical education to prove costly

A report on the state of our polytechnic institutes in yesterday's issue of this newspaper makes dismal reading. And it does because it demonstrates graphically the various ailments that these institutes have been suffering from over the years. What does amaze one is the fact that hardly any steps have been taken to deal with all the anomalies stymieing these institutes. Consider this: as much as 46 per cent of faculty positions remain unfilled at 49 polytechnic and mono-technic institutes in the country. Now, with no fewer than 24,000 students taking admission in these institutes on an annual basis, the question can be legitimately raised as to why conditions have been allowed to come to such a pass. Or are we to suppose that the polytechnic institutes, which have always played a crucial role in producing mid-level technicians and engineers, are being quietly being sidelined?

As it is, enrollment to science education is declining. And if the state of technical institutes is in such dire straits then how it would affect science education is a matter to seriously ponder.

If that is so, it becomes the moral responsibility of the authorities to go into the very disturbing matter of the extent to which bureaucracy has been contributing to the situation at these institutes. In recruitment and promotion, among other factors, there have been suspicions regarding the modalities followed by the authorities of the polytechnic institutes. And the suspicions have been enough to give rise to frustration among the teaching staff. Add to that the reality of the inadequacy of teaching staff, which in turn has compelled many teachers into being burdened with extra classes. The truth is that teaching under pressure only leads to a maiming of education. Twenty nine institutes have 62 per cent of teaching positions vacant. Twelve of them have no principals. The results can only be horrendous.

Such conditions cannot be permitted to go on. The education ministry must get a move on to remove the anomalies and set technical education on a course compatible with the increasing demand for technical hands

Obama wins. Now what?



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

LAST week, President Barack Obama was reelected for his last term as president of the USA. He has the distinction of being the second president from the Democratic Party to be elected for two full terms with a credible majority since President F.D. Roosevelt. Obama again won both the popular and the Electoral College (EC) votes. However the Democratic Party did not fare so well in elections to the House of Representatives. The Republican Party retained its majority there. The US Senate saw the Democratic Party slightly ahead.

Now that Obama will stay back in the White House for another 4 years, what are his plans for the people of his country and the world at large? The USA in many ways is a politically divided country today. On one hand the Democrats and their followers are keen to reduce the huge national debt which today amounts to almost \$14 trillion. But they want to do this by taxing the rich and spending on the poor and the marginalised. They also want to generate jobs in America. Obama did successfully generate employment by revitalising the US auto industry when it was in deep debt in the last recession. In his first term the Ppresident ended the US military intervention in Iraq. This time round he pledged to bring back all the US combat troops from Afghanistan by 2014. But this does not mean that he will relent on counter-terrorism measures. He wants to ensure that US citizens are never messed with and the perpetrators do not get away unscathed.

The Republican Party on the other hand wants to reduce taxes on the rich so that they can invest their

savings on starting new enterprises in the US that hire Americans. It does not want to spend much on education but want to kick-start the economy through investments by the rich. In foreign policy, the Party's stand is to disengage as much as possible from China and not to be more indebted to them in the future. It wants to export more American products to China and want it to open its huge market to American products. It also wants to spend more on the American mili-

over telephones and through house visits. He also concentrated his campaign in the heavily populated big cities and townships as well on the traditionally undecided voters who reside in about eleven of the states in the USA -- like Iowa, Ohio, Florida, etc.

So what now? Come January 20, 2013, when Obama is sworn in for the second time, he will need to use the two advantages he brings with him to the Oval Office. As he will be not contesting in the next presidential elections he will now be quite

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tary without deciding on a global strategy.

Now that Obama has won the presidency it may be important to analyse what triggered his victory. It is now known that he capitalised on the American demographic dividend. The youth stood by his message. They liked what he said about education, school fees, teachers and research. They also liked what he said about health care and lowering its cost. Add to the youth, women (who constitute almost half of the electorate) moved towards Obama. They liked his position on women's right to abortion and their inherent right over their bodies. Obama also got overwhelming support of the fastest growing segment of the American population, Hispanics and African Americans. Obama had assured the Hispanics that he would, if elected, have a fresh look at US immigration policy.

The Republicans under Romney could garner support of the white community only, which is dwindling in size. But what really brought out the voters in large numbers on election day was his campaign strategy. His supporters had personally contacted more than 50 million voters

free to reach across the Congressional aisle and encourage bipartisanship when he needs to decide on critical economic and foreign policy issues. Secondly, he will not be required to raise funds for reelection. So he will be free from the influence of national lobbies, be they trade unions or professional bodies as well as powerful special interest groups. So he will be able to judge issues purely on their merit. This may therefore allow him to leave an excellent legacy of a successful presidency.

Immediately, however, Obama has to regain the confidence of his detractors in the Republican Party and bring them round to support his move not to lower the tax on the rich. The deadline for this to be decided upon is fast approaching. He will have to reach a compromise formula soon. He has also to see that no new taxes are imposed on the middle class. Then he will need to discover how he can generate revenue to meet the gargantuan fiscal deficit. In that case, he may have to stop many projects which would otherwise take away the national savings.

He needs to give priority to

upgrading major infrastructure projects so that new jobs can come into the market and at the same time help new business. He also has to see that investment funds flow to small and medium size businesses so that business confidence increases. Amidst all this, he should build up human capital by starting large scale retraining programmes and better and cheaper health care. Obama thinks also that America should lead in research and innovation. So he has to encourage the best brains in the world to come to America easily and be persuaded to stay there. This will stop outsourcing abroad by American entrepreneurs.

President Obama has to look anew at his military and foreign policy options. Although he is withdrawing American troops from Afghanistan, he has to decide on disengaging from Pakistan. His drone attacks in the wild Waziristan district of Pakistan have made him unpopular with the Pakistan government and the people. He needs to regain the confidence of Pakistan to fight the Taliban. He also needs to look at the Middle East. Israel's aggressive attitude towards Iran had derailed American strategy to contain Iran's nuclear programme, if any. Again, the issue of a Palestinian state needs to be finally resolved with Israel. Obama has a chance now to attempt to do all this. Bringing permanent peace to the Middle East could be one of his lasting legacies.

We in Bangladesh welcome President Obama's reelection. He has been a reliable friend of the people of Bangladesh. He is well liked here. We therefore wish him well. It is now to be seen whether, in the future, this faith which the majority of the people of the USA and the world have reposed on him is not misplaced.

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Australia's Asian Century: Can it benefit us?

FAKHRUDDIN A CHOWDHURY

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister Julia Gillard recently unveiled a long-overdue white paper titled "Australia in the Asian Century" detailing how Australia can play an active role in the region in the next century. The world's centre of gravity is in Asia-Pacific region and Australia is no exception.

Australian High Commissioner (HC) in Bangladesh, Mr. Greg Wilcock, wrote an article in this daily foreseeing what the future holds for Bangladesh in particular under this plan, which is nothing but good news for our compatriots.

Australian involvement in the region is not new. Since the federation in early last century, successive Australian governments had ties with Asia in one form or the other. The Australian involvement to stop the Japanese advance during the World War II, and to stem the spreading tide of communism; its armed participation in the Vietnam War, Malaysia and Korean War are well-known. Relatively recently, Australia played a pivotal role in forming the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum and also tried to be part of Asean, albeit as an observer.

In spite of historic connections with Asia, some prominent politicians came up with statements such as "no Asian immigration" or "where is Asia -- isn't that the place we fly over while going to Europe?" Australia still claims to be a western nation, probably because of its root being from West, even though its location on the globe could not be any further to the East. Bangladeshi settlement in

Australia is fairly recent. My migration to Australia was approved in October, 1970. I deferred for a year and arrived on this shore for settlement in the midst of our war of independence. In those days we did not know much about Australia other than kangaroos and the names of five capital cities that were cricket test venues because of our sheer "love of cricket" as the HC wrote. I found only 2/3 families living here as migrants and about half a dozen families and singles who were here for higher studies on Colombo Plan scholarships. We

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showed the way for the massive settlement now.

The HC's estimate of 30,000 Bangladeshi-born citizens living here is a very conservative figure. We believe that many are living in Sydney alone and there are large communities in Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane. When I arrived, White Australia policy was on the wane, but was not totally abolished till the Whitlam government came to power in 1972. By the way, Mr Whitlam still remains the first (may be the only) PM to have visited Bangladesh.

Over the past 30 years, as a result of universal migration policy and generous humanitarian intake, the Australian demography has dramatically changed. An estimated 150

different nationalities live here peacefully in a multicultural society. Among them, the Bangladeshi community, in our opinion, is an elite community and is regarded as an emerging one. In almost every university many are full professors, associate professors and lecturers. One of them has reached the position of deputy vice-chancellor of a university. Equal numbers are teaching in colleges. Many are working in both private and public sectors in responsible positions. Bangladeshis in Australia are generally honest, sincere and hard-

working, and making their contribution to the prosperity of Australia. Bangladesh, with its vast human capital, can easily be a good source for filling the labour shortage of Australia. During our independence war Australia played a great sympathetic role in our cause. It was one of the first nations to recognise the newly-liberated Bangladesh, in defiance of some of its closest allies.

At the initial stage of our independence Australia had been fortunate to have had two of the best Bangladeshi diplomats as high commissioners in Mr. Hossain Ali and Mr. S.A.M.S. Kibria, who had helped establish a close, friendly relationship with Australia. Subsequent high commissioners built on their good

work. Bangladesh and Australia should exploit this relationship to each other's advantage.

Australia is a wealthy resourceful nation. Many countries of the world depend on its meat, grains, dairy products, powdered milk and processed foods. Australia should expand its trading link with Bangladesh from the meagre \$100 million. For the expansion of trade with Bangladesh, we should apprise the world of our vast consumer market of about 150 million people, that there is no language barrier in people to people communication, and the friendly nature of our people.

Bangladesh must also reform its mode of clearing incoming goods by removing excessive red tape. To back this, I wish to relate an anecdote. A few years ago, on a vacation trip to Bangladesh, my family and I decided to take some unused old garments for distribution among the poor. We took them as unaccompanied baggage. After spending one full day with the assistance of a clearing agent, payment of duties and other backdoor payments, signatures in 56 different places and the loss of a cell-phone, the two boxes were finally cleared. By the end of the day my poor new passport was like 10 years old from excessive handling over dirty and dusty places. There must be a better way.

We share High Commissioner Mr. Wilcock's optimistic view that we all get a chance to reap the benefits of Australia's Asian Century and help create a better world.

The writer is retired director of an Australian pharmaceutical company.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 11

- 1865** Treaty of Sinchula is signed by which Bhutan cedes the areas east of the Teesta River to the British East India Company.
- 1942** World War II: Nazi Germany completes its occupation of France.
- 1942** World War II: The Second Battle of El Alamein is won by the British in El Alamein, Egypt.
- 1962** Kuwait's National Assembly ratifies the Constitution of Kuwait.
- 2004** The Palestine Liberation Organization confirms the death of Yasser Arafat from unidentified causes. Mahmoud Abbas is elected chairman of the PLO minutes later.