

## STRAIGHT LINE

## Open invitation for political intervention

*Khaleda Zia's comments are unacceptable*

**B**NP chief, Kaleda Zia's article published in the Washington Times took us by surprise. To think that a country's former prime minister holding the office twice and the present opposition leader can ask for intervention from a foreign power on any issue is unheard of. It is little wonder that the ruling party MPs in parliament were up in arms in their condemnation of what has been stated.

One may easily ask what Khaleda Zia's reaction would have been had she been the prime minister and Sheikh Hasina, as leader of the opposition, had written a similar piece in a foreign newspaper. We question Khaleda Zia's wisdom of action in asking for foreign governments to get involved in the internal affairs of our country. This is totally unacceptable and we register our protest in strongest of terms.

The leader of the opposition can and is expected to highlight the failures of the government. She may also, in rare instances, take her case to foreign media. Where we really part ways with her is her open invitation to the US government that it steps up pressure on an elected government to reinstate the caretaker system of government. Whatever may be the circumstances of the doing away with the caretaker system, it is highly objectionable when a person of Khaleda Zia's stature seeks foreign assistance to undermine an elected government.

We understand why the BNP chief may feel frustrated. It is a fact, and we have written against it, that the present AL government has been very high handed and repressive in their dealings with the opposition. But to correct all the wrongs of the government, Begum Zia must appeal to the people of Bangladesh and not any foreign government.

In a democracy, power for change is in the hands of the people. It emanates from the people and not from any outside influence a point worth remembering. Her appeal for 'change' should be to and only to the electorate. There has not been a single instance in recent history where "foreign intervention" has helped save democracy.

## Instability in rice market

*Food security needs to be carefully beefed up*

**A**t a time when rice prices are on the increase, the government has decided to shelve its earlier plan to export it. Some limited export could have brought a buoyancy in the rice market helping the farmers to get better prices.

Obviously, however, the government wants to keep cereal stock at a healthy level when the rice market is showing signs of instability in terms of prices and availability. Between export earnings and maintaining a buffer stock of food the government has opted for the latter course.

The food minister is being cautious apprehending that a sudden natural calamity may affect production and push the prices up. Our run of luck with weather may not last indefinitely.

The spiralling prices of rice is in large part due to huge paddy purchase by millers and the effect of cold wave which made drying of paddy difficult for them.

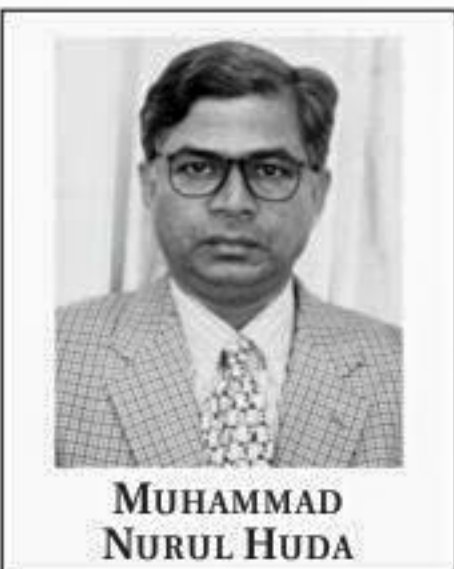
As it is, output of aus in the current fiscal 2012-2013 fell 3 percent to 22.58 lakh tonnes owing to reduced acreage, going by a Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' estimate. Aman output is likely to be level with last year's production.

The president of the wholesalers' association blames huge purchases on speculation of a low production in the next boro season, the chief component of our rice basket. There is also the factor of delayed plantation due to cold weather which has given rise to an apprehension of a lower output.

All the same, we have an intrinsic self-sufficiency in food, particularly when we have been free of calamity ravages for a few years in a row.

Now the problem is storing all the surplus rice. A news item some days ago, underscored that some 10.5 lakh tonnes of rice need to be scientifically preserved in good silos. Also hoarding among rice traders will have to be cut

# 'Pepper gas' and civil liberty



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

**C**OERCIVE actions by police, in particular the recent use of "Pepper-spray," have given rise to much controversy. Rights

activists have termed it as a serious violation of democratic rights. In fact, the coercive nature of policing is what sets the police apart from any other agency within society and what creates the ambivalent relationship between society and its police. Traditionally, society has made legitimate coercion a state monopoly which has been exercised by police, and this monopoly is threatened by attempts to devolve order maintenance or patrolling functions to private security companies, or even to members of the public engaged in anti-crime patrols in their own area.

There is a clear recognition within society that some form of coercion is necessary, yet any society which is thoroughly imbued with the concepts of individual liberty and personal rights will insist on the minimum necessary level of coercion, and rigorous safeguards against any abuse of coercive powers.

In many nations, police are the sole organised, armed body permitted to use force against the civil population, and as such, have a potential for great power within society. The safeguards and restraints put on the use of this power, and the higher level of accountability of police than any other organisation is indicative of both the uniqueness of police power and the restrictions incumbent upon it in a free society

Human experience indicates that noble sentiments alone are too weak

to control those whose ambitions, greed, aggression and anger give way to threatening and damaging activity on either a small or a grand scale. From insurgency to simple theft there are requirements for laws and for some form of enforcement of those laws. The principal instruments of enforcement in most countries are the police and the judicial processes.

There is a continuing effort to ensure that the system created to protect civil liberties does not become an instrument of bondage. In addition, there are activities to see that the manner of control and

person be convicted."

It would appear that the rule of law and its criminal jurisprudence are unequivocally in favour of the offenders, the criminals, the law breakers and the accused persons. One could say that the dice from the very beginning is loaded against police effectiveness. One may be led to believe that police effectiveness and civil liberties can hardly co-exist in a society governed by the rule of law. One could go further and say that the society is constrained to sacrifice police effectiveness at the altar of civil liberties, and that is the desirable course.

**It is desirable for police officials to acquire a general consciousness of concepts of democracy, justice, fundamental freedoms and human rights. But this in itself would be insufficient if police practice was not pervaded, and directed in accordance, with this consciousness and knowledge.**

the nature of the system's work in relation to containing crime and disorder does not take away those basic freedoms enshrined in domestic and international laws.

Experts are of the considered view that it should be both possible and desirable for coercive power to be mixed with discretion, particularly in respect of protecting civil liberty. Securing of the balancing of human liberty with adequate control of human indiscretion is a democratic necessity.

The reality on ground is that the rule of law, in its application to the criminal process is primarily concerned with the protection of the rights of the accused persons and not of the victims. In upholding civil liberties of the citizens, a basic principle of criminal jurisprudence is: "Let ninety nine guilty persons be acquitted but not even one innocent

In our democratic dispensation citizens would expect much of their police. The police have to negotiate a delicate balance. They have to secure human rights and at the same time exercise the lawful powers given to them by governments in the name of the people, to protect the people and their institutions.

Laws have been promulgated which give police wide powers to deny human rights, in some cases even the most basic civil liberties. Thus, police authority can be abused in a democratic polity. Such authority would actually snuff out more freedom than it protects. The main problem lies in control.

Under circumstances as above, the government in its earnestness to uphold civil liberties, has to ensure that those who are chosen to exercise the power and authority of police officials are carefully selected

for their human qualities, properly trained to perform their difficult duties in an ethically correct manner and, very importantly, to be led and directed by persons with high qualities of human excellence.

When police is seen to be at the service of human liberty public support will be forthcoming to a greater degree. It is thus important that police officials are enabled to address their minds to this phenomenon. In fact, social actions and influence of police could be brought to bear in significantly preventing crime and disorder.

We may take note of the reality that where individuals or groups are exposed to great inequality of treatment or rendered victims to denial of human rights and civil liberties generally, they may resort to anti social or criminal behaviour. Therefore, police with a developed social awareness will have better opportunities for prevention of crimes and maintenance of social order.

Our police need to develop a demeanour which embodies an instinct or a perception for human liberty and dignity. Being witness to human beings, often in degrading and degraded situations, they are exposed to the influence of cynicism. They have to avoid becoming indifferent, however difficult that may be, if they are to develop and retain proper judgment of and appreciation for the rights and dignities of all.

It is desirable for police officials to acquire a general consciousness of concepts of democracy, justice, fundamental freedoms and human rights. But this in itself would be insufficient if police practice were not pervaded, and directed in accordance, with this consciousness and knowledge.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

## AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN

# Reconciliation is the key

NAJMUDDIN A. SHAIKH

**P**ERHAPS the best news to emerge concerning Afghanistan over the last few days is the five-day visit of the Afghan Defence Minister Gen. Bismillah Khan Mohammadi to Pakistan at the invitation of our army chief.

The visit is in response to an invitation that Gen. Ashfaq Pervez Kayani had extended in November 2012 at a tripartite meeting on border security. It has been, judging by initial press reports, a good beginning to establishing the sort of trust that is needed for genuine cooperation in tackling the common problem of terrorism and to carry forward an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led process of reconciliation.

The normally cautious Inter-Services Public Relations, the military's media wing, in its press statement has focused on only two elements, the first of which was the initiation of an "enduring training relationship" between the armed forces of the two countries.

Apparently, during the remaining part of the visit, Gen. Bismillah and his team, which includes the commandant of the Afghan National Defence College, will be hosted at Pakistan's army training establishments. Hopefully, Afghan officers will be sent to the Pakistani National Defence University and other institutes.

There may well be a formal agreement on the deputation of Pakistani officers to help set up new Afghan training institutes and to man existing institutes from which Nato officers will, for the most part, be withdrawn as the drawdown of forces occurs. If this happens, it will be a welcome change from the earlier position of the Afghans not being able to avail of the offer of seats in these institutes that had been made some years ago. At that time it was said that the Pakistan offer was not

generous enough in terms of the stipends and other facilities that the Afghan trainees would receive.

The second element was a discussion of the Standard Operating Procedures agreed upon in November for ensuring border security. One hopes that this was not a point of discord.

To my mind, however, the most important point was the reiteration by Gen. Bismillah of Afghan gratitude for the Pakistani release of Afghan Taliban prisoners to facilitate reconciliation. This followed the statement by our foreign secretary in Dubai earlier this month after the meeting of the core group -- Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US -- that Pakistan would release all the Taliban it was holding.

It was important because both in the American and Afghan press there have been critical articles claiming that the whereabouts of the Taliban detainees released so far were not known or that those released had joined the ranks of Taliban fighters rather than talking to the Kabul government. Clearly the Karzai administration continues to be confident that these releases will further the reconciliation process.

As one looks at the current situation in Afghanistan, it is apparent that reconciliation alone offers the prospect of bringing a modicum of peace to the country which is ill-prepared for the economic consequences of the withdrawal of foreign forces and the expected drop in economic activity.

It is even less prepared to continue the battle against the insurgents not merely because the Afghan National Security Forces are

not yet a fully trained fighting force but because they cannot operate without the support of the aviation units and Special Operation forces provided by Nato, particularly the US forces.

Illustrative of the problems that the Afghan forces have to contend with is the grim Pentagon statistic that the number of Americans killed by improvised explosive devices (IED) was 104 in 2012. This was a considerable drop when compared to the figure of 196 in 2011, but in the same period the number of Afghan security forces killed by IEDs rose by 124% to more than 1,100.

The attrition rate in the army has been rising at the rate of 3.1% of the total force. Army units that have achieved a measure of competence, such as the Afghan corps in Helmand, are handicapped in the fight against the insurgents because the police are non-functional and many units are therefore manning checkpoints rather than fighting.

This is not a force that can defeat the Afghan Taliban and bring peace. Political problems are also multiplying. President Hamid Karzai has prevailed upon the Independent Election Commission to withdraw its proposal for re-registering all voters because this would be too costly, and to confine new registration only to those who had not been registered for the earlier election in 2009.

The opposition has reacted strongly, claiming that this would mean a fraudulent electoral exercise. There have been calls for the international community to intervene not only to get this decision reversed but also to reinstate the

Elections Complaints Commission, a body that Karzai, in the legislation he has proposed, intends to abolish and replace with a special bench of the Afghan Supreme Court. This is clearly a recipe for political turmoil and for deepening the ethnic divide that has sharpened in recent months.

The coming economic slump is now clearly visible. Construction firms are getting no new contracts and much of the sophisticated equipment acquired during the building boom now stands idle. More and more educated Afghans employed with high salaries in foreign NGOs that are winding up operations or at foreign military bases now being shut down are desperately seeking, and not finding, other employment.

Perhaps more importantly, there has been a precipitate decline in real estate prices in Kabul as people try to liquidate Afghan assets and invest them abroad. A prevalent joke in Kabul is that prices in Peshawar's posh Hayatabad suburb are rising in direct proportion to the fall in prices in Kabul. There has been a steep rise in the number of immigration visa-seekers at virtually every embassy in Kabul.

There is little that any government in Afghanistan can do to mitigate the ill-effects of the economic difficulties that will follow the foreign forces' withdrawal. The government can, if Karzai chooses, quell the political turbulence that the opposition will certainly create if issues pertaining to the conduct of the 2014 elections are not resolved, by negotiating a compromise.

But the only way to avoid chaos lies in advancing reconciliation. Pakistan's essential cooperation is on offer and can be increased but it is now for Karzai and his team to move ahead.

The writer is a former foreign secretary of Pakistan. © Dawn (Pakistan). All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Asia News Network.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 2

**1966** Pakistan suggests a six-point agenda with Kashmir after the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965.

**1971** The international Ramsar Convention for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands is signed in Ramsar, Mazandaran, Iran.

**1982** February 1982 Hama massacre: the government of Syria attacks the town of Hama.

**1987** After the 1986 People Power Revolution, the Philippines enacts a new constitution.

**1989** Soviet war in Afghanistan: The last Soviet armoured column leaves Kabul.