

PM's conditional condition

Address the bone of contention

THERE is a hint that reality may have finally dawned at last on the prime minister when she said that a fresh election could be held, to the 11th parliament, if the BNP met certain conditions. While we commend her for the change of attitude, we feel that this is an acknowledgement by Sheikh Hasina that her so called upholding the constitution may have served to boost her ego but it has greatly damaged our politics, economy and social stability and has cost us many lives.

Thus far the PM has displayed a total lack of respect for public opinion regarding the poll-time government to conduct the next parliament election. And while we have condemned opposition violence in unambiguous terms, we wonder whether the PM has ever paused to ponder on the cause of this violence.

After 154 candidates becoming MPs 'uncontested' there is tremendous resentment among the voters, and there are more than 50 million of them, for being deprived of their right to vote. Today, election is no longer an AL versus BNP issue, but a matter of the voters, regardless of party affiliation

We hope that the PM has realised that without a poll-time government acceptable to all parties no credible election can be held. And in this regard although there is a perceptible climb down by the BNP from its earlier position for neutral non-party makeup, the bone of contention, Sheikh Hasina being head of a poll-time government, still remains. And unless that is resolved the situation will persist no matter how many elections are held.

E-health initiative welcome

Carry it forward in a planned way

TECHNOLOGY based health education is a trend which holds much possibility in Bangladesh. In recent times, foreign donors, private and public sectors have gotten involved in this process. A three and a half month project titled eHealth Pilot Programme found that more people followed advice of the field-level health assistants on health and family planning issues after they were taught the information using netbooks equipped with a eToolkit and video materials.

From implementing better family planning methods, understanding maternal health to decreasing child mortality have been some of the accomplishments of the health sector in the last decade. With the new interventions of etoolkit and netbooks the process of health education may progress at a better rate.

Finding funding and replicating the pilot programmes which worked with ehealth may be issues that we need to address. Purchasing netbooks and other costs related to a project of this nature such as capacity building of trainers and following best practices are some of the barriers we need to overcome.

To accomplish a better success rate of health education around the nation more private and public bodies need to come forth. It is not an intervention that can only happen with a few, and a united effort will be more efficient so that these pilot programmes become full-fledged projects and do not remain as one-off efforts.

Democracy stood on its head

ALAMGIR KHAN

SOME years ago, a 'Minus Two' theory was floated in our politics. The people protested against this theory, and the two leaders remained. The people were relieved. But in only five years, the people are saddened that in a tragic twist of events these two leaders and their parties are now going to banish them from politics. Politics has developed from minus-two to minus-people.

The politics of AL and BNP revolve around issues least connected with what the poor people are most concerned about. Crises in the garment sector, labour law, minimum wage, illiteracy, unemployment, safety on the road, price hike of daily necessities, etc., etc. are no more the agenda for public discourse and political movement. There are many, many issues that affect people's lives more palpably than the words in the constitution that define the form of a short-term poll-time government.

People are being burnt to death and they are crying out: "I will burn the houses of politicians" (Politics For People? The Daily Star, December 15). It is horrifying to look at a charred face. Now people are watching the emergence of 'An ugly face of our democracy.' (The Daily Star, December 16) More than half of the lawmakers have been declared elected without people's vote. How do those who are elected feel? Not at all "proud of their victory as the election would suffer from credibility." Requesting anonymity, an AL leader said: "It has already tainted the long history of the Awami League" (AL heads for 2/3 majority, The Daily Star, December 16).

The number of uncontested MPs during Ershad's regime was 18, 49 during Khaleda's regime, and now it has swelled to 154, a number that deserves a place in the Guinness Book of Records. Now it may be time to revise what Abraham Lincoln said 150 years ago - 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' -- that the fools of the world have so long accepted as the definition of democracy. Our politicians have already begun to set it on its head.

The writer writes on theatre, education and socio-political issues.

Pakistan's sorrow: Raking up whose wound?

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

PAKISTAN National Assembly's resolution expressing concern over the capital punishment of Bangladeshi Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah, though outrageous, does not come as a surprise to those who are aware of the military-feudal mindset of that country's ruling class. One could perhaps ignore the manifest impertinence and ignorance of Pakistan's interior minister in commenting that Mollah was hanged "through a judicial murder for supporting a united Pakistan in 1971."

Pakistan's National Assembly may be within its rights to express grief and sorrow for the execution of a traitor and quisling of 1971, but when it demands that Bangladesh avoid reviving the wounds of 1971 it clearly betrays an arrogantly diseased mind that has not as yet come to grips with the reality. The fact of the matter is that in 1971, Bengalis, despite clinching an electoral majority were not only denied their due, they also became the unfortunate victims of a regime-sponsored genocide whose gory details and dimensions are yet to be ferreted out.

The recently published scholarly book *Blood Telegrams*, that tells of a forgotten genocide and the Spivac Communications before and after Bangladesh's cruel birth, brings tragically to the fore the monstrous deeds committed by the Pakistan army and its Jamaat collaborators against hapless Bengalis in 1971. Leaving aside this credible evidence, one could talk to scores of living men and women of Bangladesh who are first-hand witnesses to the horrendous criminality and bestiality of the Jamaat hirelings against their own countrymen in 1971.

It is, in fact, only a small fraction of the above perpetrators that have been accounted for and are now being charged for crimes against humanity. Let us be very clear on one point, and that is that after March 25, 1971, no self-respecting Bengali could support Pakistan establishment's action in the then East Pakistan. The Pakistan army was in fact quite unashamedly carrying out what in later days was termed as ethnic cleansing. The racist rage of the 'Brown Sahibs' against the dark skinned Bengalis, though co-religionists, was manifest. Unspeakable and dastardly crimes were committed in the name of so-called 'Islamisation drive.'

Let us do some fact checking. The fact that Muslim League, which spearheaded the Pakistan movement, was founded in Dhaka in 1906; the fact that the historic Lahore Resolution of 1940 demanding independent homeland for Muslims in the Indian subcontinent was initiated by a Bengali Braveheart and also the reality that in 1946 Bengali Muslims voted overwhelmingly in favour of Pakistan, could not be grounds for Bengalis to remain within the Pakistan state. The reason was painfully clear. In 1971, their

rights, honour, culture and existence were at stake. Pakistan state was the enemy.

The Bengalis of East Pakistan experienced the insensitiveness of the Pakistan establishment quite early in 1948 when their mother tongue was denied the recognition of state language. It had to be earned after much struggle and loss in terms of human lives in 1952. A duly elected government was arbitrarily toppled by executive arrogance. Economically and politically, East Pakistan was reduced to the ignominy of a colony. It was thus no wonder that Bengali nationalism received unprecedented support in the general election of 1970. That support was most brutally countered by the Pakistani military junta. For Bengalis, in 1971, there was no love left for Pakistan.

Historically speaking, and insofar as Jamaat-e-Islami is concerned, Pakistan failed first in 1953 when two groups of Muslims fought bloody battles on the streets of Lahore, known once as the pearl of the East, in the name of Islam. Hundreds died and a sect of believers was declared heretic and persecuted and persecuted since then. And, at the core of the conflict was a simple question; who was a Muslim? So much for the Jamaat-e-Islami and its brand of politics.

When a Pakistani minister terms the hanging of a quisling as judicial murder for supporting a united Pakistan in 1971, one can see the visible signposts of a self-destructing nation whose people and leaders remain blinded by unfounded myths and unreasonable denials. We can see a State riddled with mass insecurity and unrelenting rejection of its natural identity.

While we would not comment on the physical and mental harassment of the chief justice of Pakistan in the not-too-distant past, we have to emphatically assert that violence and destruction alone does not justify our existence. We do not want to create a sub-culture of hostility and brutality in which thousands would perish. Quite clearly, we cannot countenance a polity where violence against other fellow beings is justified as religious cause.

The tracking of Nazi war criminals has been an unrelenting process. Armenians have not forgotten the extermination campaign against their existence in the early twentieth century. Koreans still resent the brutalities committed by the Imperial Japanese army during the World War Two. Bangladeshis, despite being subjected to a horrendous genocide, have been more than magnanimous towards their tormentors. So, let Pakistan establishment atone for its crimes in 1971, as has been done by the Germans.

If indeed Bangladeshis are the brotherly people as has often been claimed by the Pakistani authorities then let them respond accordingly and give the brother the due respect. Let them not defile our sentiments and distort history. We owe at least this much to the countless souls who sacrificed for our sovereignty. Let Pakistanis honour themselves by paying tributes to our war heroes of 1971, especially those brave soldiers of East Bengal Regiment who in large measure gallantly defended Lahore in the 1965 war.

The writer is a columnist of the *The Daily Star*.

Who is more to blame?

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

PAKISTAN Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has repeatedly asked India to resume talks which had got snapped following the terrorists' attack on Mumbai in November 2008. His brother, chief minister of Pakistan's Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif, echoed the same sentiments during his visit to India's Punjab a few days ago. His advice to both the countries was to engage in a dialogue to settle their issues since war is no longer an option.

India's External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, too, has said that he was not against the dialogues. But he has predicated his statement with a proviso that there should be an environment for the talks to be fruitful. He probably has in mind the contentious issues which continue to sour relations between the two.

One irritant is the attack on Mumbai. The manner in which Pakistan has gone about in not punishing the perpetrators shows that it is merely going over the exercise. The suit in the law court is still at the initial stage even after five years. Numerous judges hearing the case have been either transferred or probably asked to go on leave.

I wish Pakistan's Chief Justice, Mohammad Iftikhar Chaudhari, who did a brilliant job in upholding his country's constitution in letter and spirit, had taken up the matter suo moto before retiring a few days ago. Many lawyers may mock at the suggestion, but punishment to the 26/11 terrorists is a pre-requisite to normal ties between the two countries.

Hafeez Sayeed, who India suspects to be the mastermind behind the plan to attack Mumbai and has been let off by the Pakistan court for lack of evidence, is urging a jihad against India. It may sound ridiculous but many on this side believe that he has a hand in shaping Pakistan's policy against India.

Despite these minus factors, the common man in India has warmth towards Pakistan. Visitors returning from Pakistan endlessly talk about the hospitality and affection they had experienced. Similar is the talk of love and generosity by the Pakistanis visiting India. Therefore, the blame is on the politicians and bureaucrats for not burying the hatchet. They seem to have developed a vested interest in keeping the two countries distant. I find the same faces of politicians and bureaucrats, even after their retirement, are engaged in Track II dialogue.

One Pakistani bureaucrat with a similar thinking briefed the press the other day on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's warning that Kashmir could trigger a fourth war between India and Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif's office issued a contradiction soon enough. But the damage had already been done. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, otherwise a mature politician, too reacted in an irresponsible manner. He said that "Pakistan could not win a war against India during his lifetime." I suspect his reaction was meant to show "strength" in view of forthcoming parliamentary elections.

What the prime minister or the Congress party he represents do not realise is that even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has stopped raising the anti-Pakistan bogey because there is lessening response from the public. Some in the party or outside may be carrying the baggage of history, India's partition in August 1947. But

the anti-Pakistan line does not sell any longer.

A wrong propaganda is sought to be made in Pakistan that the Indian media indulges in bashing it. This is not true. However, I wish there were more stories about Pakistan in the Indian media. But then the governments in both the countries are to blame. They have given visas only to one news agency and one newspaper. There is one television channel which adopts a war-like posture. But India has some 300 channels reporting Pakistan as they do about other countries.

Where do we go from here? The two countries can join hands in fighting against the terrorists. Nawaz Sharif has made a specific proposal that the two countries should institutionalise a mechanism of meetings between their national security advisors to discuss terrorism. At last, the two countries have fixed the meeting of Directors General of Military Operations (DGMO) of the two countries to ensure the sanctity of Line of Control (LoC) on the Jammu and Kashmir border. This is a development in the right direction.

Still what is important at this juncture is how to inspire the two countries to trust each other. Nawaz Sharif has rightly said that the real reason for estrangement is the "trust deficit" between the two countries. Many in Pakistan believe that the core problem is Kashmir. This is only a symptom, not the disease. Even if we manage to solve the Kashmir problem, some other problem would crop up if there is no trust in each other.

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The two nations are rightly conscious of the destruction the nuclear weapons, which they possess, can cause. Hence they should solve their differences peacefully. This policy came to be adopted for the first time at Tashkent after the 1965 war between the two countries. The then Indian Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, was insistent on adopting peaceful methods in sorting out their problems. The then Pakistan Martial Law Administrator, General Mohammad Ayub, said that the requirement was met by referring it to the UN Charter. The draft joint statement carried the same words. Shastri made Ayub write "without resorting to arms."

Islamabad has stated that the responsibility of honouring the LoC lies with the two governments. The reported reaction by New Delhi is that the LoC is a military matter, not a political issue. Had this response come from Pakistan, where the army has a major say, it would have been understandable. But how can a democratic India say that the armies on the two sides could decide it?

The LoC was firm up at Shimla in a meeting between Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The army commanders only demarcated on the ground the lines indicated in the agreement between the political masters. New Delhi should ponder over its stance once again so that the two countries move forward to normalise relations. This is what the situation demands.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR
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Pakistan's concern over war crimes trial

It was not wise on the part of The Daily Star to publish on Victory Day (16 December 2013) the concern of Pakistani government over the issue of war crimes trials. In 1971 Pakistan army and their collaborators in Bangladesh killed three million Bangladeshis and raped two hundred thousand women. Now they claim they are our friends.

Rest of the war criminals will be tried and the verdict will be executed. Pakistan could not save their friends/war crime collaborators with the support of Nixon, Kissinger and other international friends. It has already been confirmed by our honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Pakistani war criminals should thank their star that they are to some extent lucky, they escaped trials and execution for crimes against humanity. Still Allah's wrath had fallen on Bhutto, Yahia, Niazi and many others. Pakistan has become a failed state. They should oil their own machine. Bangladesh is progressing faster than Pakistan. Leave us alone to decide our own fate. Major General ATM Abdul Wahab (R) Sub-Sector Commander in Liberation War

Where death penalty is unavoidable...

No reasonable person I know likes death for the sake of death. However, I find it quite outrageous that various political representatives from other countries and international bodies think they are speaking on behalf of human rights when they speak against the death penalty in the Bangladesh war crimes trials. The freedom loving people of Bangladesh have been waiting for 42 long years for justice. The accomplices of Pakistani occupation forces who butchered three million Bangalees are now being brought to justice through the war crimes trials. The fallacy of those who speak against death penalty is that it assumes a sufficiently politically stable environment to guarantee that those served life sentences will indeed not be freed at some point in the future. This assumption of political stability is simply not something which can be guaranteed in contemporary Bangladesh. Maybe and hopefully, later on in the future death penalty can be abandoned, but not in this generation and in this specific situation insofar as the execution of justice for these war criminals is concerned.

Scott Elliott
Texas, America

Comments on post editorial, "What a gift on Victory Day!" published on December 16, 2013

Nds

Since 1991 all the parties that came to power and took the charge of governance got themselves elected through due process of electoral contest. Did they represent the people in the true sense of the term? I don't understand this childish obsession for electoral contest. The difference between contested election and non-contested one in our case is of mere cosmetic value, nothing substantive.

Ezajur Rahman

Bravo Sir! You have made a devastatingly correct point. Well said. The game of BNP and AL is to convince the people that the one and only priority is a peaceful election. It is to divert people from the actual priority -- reform of AL and BNP.

Talkfair

As I understand, improvement is a continuous process in the positive direction and there is no limit to it, as such.

Syed Waqar Yousuf

Immediately announce new Caretaker Government that would hold free and fair election with the participation of all political parties. For peace and economic progress all the parties should forget their personal interests.

Sohail

One party rule is what made Singapore a developed country. Too much democracy has turned all the Sub-continent countries into functioning chaos. Five years of one-party rule should be a good start for Bangladesh to get on track for becoming a developed country.

"Detained' Ershad being sent abroad" (December 18, 2013)

Aasfisarwar

How can you justify an illegal detention and deportation as drama? Please call a spade a spade.

OpeeMonir

It's a huge drama, but by no means an illegal detention; Ershad made fool of us in a second row in recent days where Dr. Badruddoza even fell victim unfortunately. He is a tough actor indeed. He really fooled even his own party members. Here is a perfect case of act of treason...we must find a way to try him.

Snr Citizen

Let there be more light.

MH Khan

What was wrong with minus two formula then, except Jamaati hand in the military junta?

Akhtar Shah

One couldn't make a bigger mess even in a dream! It's a mega joke!