

Why we don't get no respect A Bangladeshi Secretary General?



FAREED ZAKARIA writes from Washington

If the Bush administration wants to gain the benefits of a new and different foreign policy, it needs to actually have a new and different foreign policy without rogue officials' constantly undermining it. And it has to convince the world that this new policy is the product of a change of heart, not a change of circumstance.

THE Bush administration must wonder these days if it has a Rodney Dangerfield problem. No matter what it does, it can't seem to get any respect. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has engineered a broad shift in American diplomacy over the last year, moving policy toward greater multilateralism, cooperation and common sense on Iran, North Korea and Iraq, and several other issues.

And yet it hasn't produced a change in attitudes toward the United States. The recent Pew global survey documents a further drop in America's poor image abroad. President Bush tried to be conciliatory while visiting Europe last week but confronted an angry public. A poll published in the Financial Times on the eve of his visit showed that across the continent, the United States was considered a greater threat to world peace than Iran or North Korea.

Why aren't people noticing the new, improved Bush foreign policy? First, the changes coming out of Washington have been very recent. Perhaps more important, they remain incremental and incomplete. This is probably because they are still contested within the administration.

Almost all of those officials who embody the administration's crude and clumsy policies of the first term by Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney remain in office. They merely appear to be lying low, for now. So there's a limit to how much things can change. What appears like a revolution in Bush policy the administration is now finally thinking that maybe, possibly, Guantanamo should be shut down if it is just the belated arrival of common sense.

Rice and her team are clearly in charge and extremely capable but they operate within fairly tight constraints. The result is that the

new approach retains many elements of the old: hectoring rhetoric, constant conditions and stiff demands. US negotiators can talk to the North Koreans, but only on certain subjects in limited ways.

For example, the North Korea talks have gone nowhere for some months in part because the United States has suddenly decided that Pyongyang's counterfeiting of currency is a deal-breaker and must stop before any further progress can be achieved. Memo to Washington: get your priorities right. The urgent problem right now is not that North Korea can make fake dollars but that it can make genuine nukes.

On Iran, Rice has won a broader reversal of policy by personally making her case to the president. But even there, the offer of talks is tightly conditional. She does not appear to have the flexibility and scope to really explore the diplomatic option. No one in the administration seems able to really take a fresh look. The entire approach of isolating, shunning and sanctioning regimes as a way of changing them or their behavior has been an unmitigated failure from Cuba (boycotted since 1960) to Iran (since 1979). Meanwhile, the regimes we have talked to and thus had influence within China, Vietnam, Libya are evolving. In Washington, it's still more important to look tough than be effective.

But the main reason the Bush administration's overtures aren't having the effect that might have been expected is that they have come about under duress. "You're bogged down in Iraq, and so you need us to help you," said a senior European politician who declined to be named because he didn't want to add to transatlantic tensions. "It's not a real conversion. It's a product of failure. The administration tried unilateralism and, when it failed, went for a multilateral approach."

An international diplomat, who was revealing a private conversation, went further, saying that the Iranians remain suspicious because they are themselves wary of greater engagement with the West but also because they suspect Washington's motives. "An Iranian diplomat told me that Tehran believes Washington's change of heart has come only because it is in trouble in Iraq," he said. "If the situation in Iraq stabilizes, their attitude will instantly harden."

And you know what? The Iranians might be right. The Bush administration has moved to be more conciliatory, more multilateral and more sensible. But it's done this because its preferred approach failed, most spectacularly in Iraq.

As if to remind us of its preferred option, John Bolton has remained largely unreformed at the United Nations. Taking on the politically easy task of UN-bashing, his style has alienated almost every other country, resulting in failure after failure, most notably the breakdown of a reform program that met many of the United States' demands.

His latest salvo was a crude, bullying message to Secretary-General Kofi Annan that he expected UN officials to speak only in glowing terms of the United States (even as he constantly bashes the UN). In five minutes of posturing in front of a microphone, Bolton undoes five months of careful work by his boss, the Secretary of State.

If the Bush administration wants to gain the benefits of a new and different foreign policy, it needs to actually have a new and different foreign policy without rogue officials' constantly undermining it. And it has to convince the world that this new policy is the product of a change of heart, not a change of circumstance.

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Bangladesh should join the competition and devote all its diplomatic talent and skill to win the most prestigious international job. Unpredictable things happen as a result of power politics in the international arena. Bangladesh might get the most coveted assignment. The next generation of Bangladeshis will not forgive this generation of Bangladesh leaders if they do not try for the post.

TALUKDER MANIRUZAMAN

I must first of all thank Mr. Abdul Hassan for his article: "Why Lag Behind the Race for the Next UNSG?" in The Daily Star of June 23.

The Bangladesh government launched a massive diplomatic effort for the post of Secretary General of Organization of Islamic Conferences. Unfortunately, there was no national consensus behind the candidate nominated by the government. The Islamic countries ultimately came to know that the candidate nominated by the Bangladesh government was a partisan rather than a national candidate and a major diplomatic debacle of the foreign ministry followed.

It is sheer lack of vision on the part of our foreign ministry that they did not even think of nominating a candidate for the post of Secretary General of the United Nations to be selected/elected by September/October this year. This is surprising given the back drop of the fact that there are excellent prospects of a Bangladeshi nominee being selected as the Secretary General of the UN.

Bangladesh has an excellent record of service to the UN. Because of the intense diplomatic efforts of President Ziaur Rahman, Foreign Minister Shamsul Huq, and Foreign Secretary SAMS Kibria, Bangladesh was elected as non-permanent member of the Security Council of the UN in 1978 by defeating Japan. Bangladesh acted as rotating President of the Security Council for one month and Mr. Kibria presided over the meetings of the Security Council.

As far as my knowledge goes, the Secretary General of the UN at that time was very impressed by the performance of Mr. Kibria and requested President Ziaur Rahman to put the service of Mr. Kibria at the disposal of the UN.

President Zia agreed and Kibria was made Assistant General Secretary of the UN and given the job of chief executive of ESCAP in Bangkok.

By all accounts Kibria did an excellent job as an UN executive for twelve years until his retirement. As a young and small nation Bangladesh had the distinction of being elected as the President of the General Assembly of the UN in 1986. Mr. Humayun Rashid Choudhury, as the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, had the rare privilege of presiding over the World Assembly. Bangladesh was again elected member of Security Council in 1999 and presented to the UN community an excellent performance.

Bangladesh was elected as the head of the UN 5th Committee (Administration and Budgetary), Committee on Program and Coordination, UNICEF Executive Board, UN Population and Award Committee. Bangladesh had been active member of the Group of 77.

Bangladesh has been justly proud of contributing large numbers of troops to peacekeeping missions organized by the UN in the countries ravaged by severe ethnic conflicts. The performance of Bangladeshi peacekeepers has received plaudits from all over the world. Given this track record, Bangladesh deserves consideration by the members of the Security Council and the members of the General Assembly as a candidate for the top post of the UN Secretary General.

Do we have suitable candidates for the top executive job of the UN? To my mind we do have an extremely competent candidate for the world organization: I feel that Dr. Kamal Hossain is a suitable candidate for the post.

He is the author of the Constitution of our country. He is an internationally known jurist. In 1989-90 I was a fellow at

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Several judges of the International Court of Justice, which is an organization of the UN, gave lectures at SIPRI at that time. To my great pride some of them were full of praise for the legal acumen of Dr. Kamal Hossain.

There are, however, problems about Dr. Kamal Hossain's selection as the Secretary General of the UN. As has been pointed out by Mr. Abdul Hannan, charismatic political leaders like Anthony Eden and Charles De Gaulle were considered for the post of first Secretary General of the UN but were rejected in favor of Trygve Lie, a politician cum diplomat.

But political leaders like Thai Deputy Prime Minister Sura Kirat Sathi Rathai, South Korean Foreign Minister Banki Moon, and Sri Lanka's Jayantha Dharmapala, advisor to the Sri Lankan President are in the race. So there is no harm if Dr. Kamal Hossain is nominated by Bangladesh. It seems to me that if Dr. Kamal Hossain is nominated for the top UN job, there will be no objection by either of two major parties.

I feel that some might argue that Dr. Kamal Hossain is one of our few sober, foresighted, honest, and visionary political leaders. He could serve the country better as a political leader rather than as the top executive of the UN. I feel that government should talk to the opposition as well as Dr. Kamal Hossain before sponsoring his name.

In case Dr. Kamal Hossain's name could not be sponsored, there are other good Bangladeshi candidates. Mr. Hannan has mentioned the names of Reaz Rahman and Dr. Iftekar Ahmed Choudhury. According to Mr. Hannan our best candidate would be Anwarul Karim Choudhury. After SAMS Kibria, the late lamented former Finance



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Minister, Mr. Choudhury is the senior-most UN official from Bangladesh. Mr. Hannan has detailed the vast diplomatic experience and solid accomplishments of Anwarul Karim Choudhury. I need not repeat them here.

We could also look for other talents. For example Mustafa Kamal, a debonair, brilliant LSE educated and Lincoln's Inn trained lawyer, who retired as the chief justice of Bangladesh and is now acting as the chairman of the Law Commission is, to my mind, another talent for the job of the top executive of the UN.

He has vast experience of the UN system. He was a member of the Pakistan delegation to the 25th session of the UN General Assembly. In 1976 he again worked in the UN as a member of the Bangladesh delegation to the UN General Assembly session. In 1977 he was a member of the Bangladesh Delegation to the conference on Sea Law held under the auspices of the UN in New York. In 1978 he attended the same conference. He again served as a member of the Bangladesh delegation to the UN General Assembly with Justice BA Siddique as the leader of the delegation.

The players of international politics the sovereign states have

developed a consensus that the post of Secretary General of the UN should rotate among the six continents of the globe. The first secretary at the time of founding of the UN was from Europe. The UN already had three Secretary Generals from Europe, one from Latin America, two from Africa, and one from Asia.

There is a strong possibility that this year the Secretary Generalship might go to Asia. American Ambassador to UN Mr. Bolton has been saying that the post of Secretary General should go to Europe. There will be a lot of diplomatic maneuvers for the post of the UN Secretary General this year.

Bangladesh should join the competition and devote all its diplomatic talent and skill to win the most prestigious international job. Unpredictable things happen as a result of power politics in the international arena. Bangladesh might get the most coveted assignment. The next generation of Bangladeshis will not forgive this generation of Bangladesh leaders if they do not try for the post.

The writer is a National Professor of Bangladesh and alone responsible for the views expressed in the article.

HELEN KELLER BIRTH ANNIVERSARY Being sighted without eyes

So it is the demand of the time that Helen Keller must be included in the text curriculum both Bangla and English for the greater interest of our fellow disabled to help bring them in the mainstream of development and so that all children can learn of and take inspiration from her shining example.

PARVEZ BABUL

"We are never really happy until we try to brighten the lives of others"
-Helen Keller.

BRING the light to the blind (ondhozone deho alo). Most of us are familiar with this humanitarian appeal. And Helen Keller, the world acclaimed great woman responded to this appeal and worked selflessly for the blind/visually impaired all over the world.

She was a blind and deaf lady. She was an inspiration for the disabled to become educated, enlightened, self-reliant, and to love their lives as they are same as the sighted people. She said: "When the door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one, which has been opened for us."

Helen Keller started her mission on June 15, 1915 by rehabilitating the blind soldiers in WWI. After that she worked non-stop for the welfare of the vulnerable and disadvantaged in many countries. To give a wake-up call to the disabled, she visited many countries of all the seven continents. Wherever she went, she motivated the disabled and urged governments, NGOs, and civil societies to work for the betterment of the blind, vulnerable and destitute people.

In addition to that she wrote articles and books for reestablishing the due rights of those disadvantaged. Helen Keller said: "I hope one day to see enough Braille presses, libraries, schools, and training centers and teachers to assure all persons the opportunities they would have had, had they not been blind. This is my greatest purpose in life."

Her write-ups have been translated into many languages. She said: "Life is made up of joy and sorrow, and in the long run we all get our share of each." There was a film on her life, titled The Miracle Worker. The docu-



Helen Keller

mentary film: Helen Keller in Her Story received an Academy Award also. Her organization, Helen Keller International, has been working for more than 90 years in many countries of the world and the number is increasing. She said: "God has given each one of us a task, which we can perform better than anyone else. We must find out what that task is, and how to do it in the best way possible."

In fact, Helen Keller herself was an institution and she was really unique. She was born in America on June 27, 1880 and died on June 1, 1968 -- just 26 days short of her 88th birthday.

She was born as a normal child, but became seriously ill at the age of one year and seven months. Though she was cured of that deadly disease, scarlet fever,

she became blind and deaf forever.

Getting no proper treatment, her parents met the scientist and telephone inventor Dr. Alexander Graham Bell for his advice. Dr. Bell advised Helen's parents to be hopeful and he appointed Anne Sullivan as a teacher for Helen Keller. As a dedicated and committed teacher Anne Sullivan started her teaching with a doll.

She wrote the word D-O-L-L in Helen's hand by finger spelling and by the end of the day Helen was able to learn 30 words through that process. "Helen is a brilliant student indeed!" Anne informed all and became very glad and encouraged.

Helen got her BA degree in 1904 from Radcliff College. Getting the news the world became surprised and realized

that Helen established an unprecedented example. Helen said: "My spirit was indeed in prison before my teacher came to me. But her love and the power of knowledge set me free, and I have lived happily in spite of my deprivations. I am seldom conscious of them, and I am never really in the dark."

To maintain impartiality, the Radcliff College authority did not allow Anne Sullivan to sit by Helen at the time of examination to spell questions in to Helen's hand. A teacher of that Radcliff College spelled the questions into Helen's hand and yet meritorious Helen got the uncommon result and graduated.

She read a lot of books in Braille on various subjects and said: "More than at any other time, when I hold a beloved book in my hand my limitations fall from me, my spirit is free." To establish women's rights for due wages and empower them, Helen said: "The women who work for a dollar a day has much right as any other human being to say what the conditions of her work should be."

She was always against the war and protested that by saying: "War is a beast that devours civilization and turns all good works to contempt. Kings and governments make war. The people pay the cost."

Thus with the spirit of Helen Keller, the disabled people gained confidence and went ahead to reach the goal of their lives. She was Helen Keller who was a role model to be sighted without eyes to guide the world for overcoming disability, poverty, superstitions, obstacles, inferiority, dependency, hopelessness, darkness, ignorance, illiteracy, cruelty, etc. She said: "Every one of us is blind and deaf until our eyes are opened to our fellowmen, until our ears hear the voice of humanity."

So it is the demand of the time that Helen Keller must be included in the text curriculum both Bangla and English for the greater interest of our fellow disabled to help bring them in the mainstream of development and so that all children can learn of and take inspiration from her shining example.

Parvez Babul is a journalist and columnist.

RATHAJATRA Festival of equality

Rathajatra festival of Jagannath is part of the Vaishnava tradition or the cult of 'Bhakti', which received an impetus after the advent of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This tradition attached no importance to the caste system and allowed people of all castes from Brahmins to Shudra to sit and eat together. It was a departure from the orthodox culture. In the Bhakti dispensation, on the other hand, not only all castes but all men and women are treated as equal. It is this tradition of equality of all that is at its best in the festival of chariot of Lord Jagannath.

PREM RANJAN DEV

THE Hindu festivals, feasts and fasts, rites and rituals, pilgrimage and holy baths and observance of sacred days are part and parcel of the great cultural heritage of Indian civilization. They are religious, social and individual source of spiritual and moral enrichment. The Hindu festivals are more than what they appear to be. They are essentially a way of living and thinking in the course of existence. The Hindu civilization is an unending procession of festivals. This statement seems true when one sees Shivaratri, Holi, Gangour, Baisakhi, Janmashanti, Ramanavami, Dussehra, Dipawali, Ramalila, Durgapuja, Rathajatra, Ganesha Chaturthi, Sankranti etc. etc. round the year.

Rathajatra, one of the grandest natural festival of Hindus, is celebrated in the month of Ashara (June-July). This is a festival of Lord Jagannath's chariot at Puri, celebrated across the sub-continent and also some other parts of the world by the Hindu Diaspora. I shall discuss the dynamic spirituality and beauty of the central Rathajatra at Puri in India. There are clearly two principal modes of approach towards the Supreme Reality. One through pure Inana (knowledge) and the other through the purest Bhakti (devotion). The path of knowledge aims at trying to know perfectly the Reality through identity with Him, whereas the approach of devotion leads to the dedicated service of the Supreme Reality. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu can be regarded as the king in the realm of Bhaktas. Truly speaking he was God-sent in the garb of Bhakta. He shines singly with his Achintya-Bhed-Abhed philosophy. Lord Jagannath is also symbol of Bhakti, diversity in unity and identity.

Lord Krishna, Mahaprabhu Shri Chaitanya in his search for Lord Krishna almost ran towards Puri from Shantipur. Six of his closest Parishada's (intimate companions) went with the Mahaprabhu in his journey to Nilachal Shreekshestra. With his Gaudiya devotees, who had arrived for the chariot festival, Mahaprabhu took part in all the festivities and sportive acts. He participated with them to clean up Gundicha temple, witnessed the Netro Utsav, saw the Pandra Bijaya, took part in holy bathing ceremony, danced and sang in the procession moving the chariot, participated in the water sports in the Indradumna tank and in the Narendra Sarovar.

Once a year Lord Jagannath travels to Gundicha temple riding his chariot and stays there for seven days only, then again returns (Uthorath) to His main temple at Puri. The devotees' eyes become thirsty to see again beloved Jagannath and with deep devotion in their eyes dream of the image of Lord Krishna through Jagannath. Proceeding before the chariot, singing and dancing, all the devotees coming from many places chant Namkirtana in praise of Lord Krishna.

The congregational chanting of the holy names of Lord Jagannath sweeps the dirt accumulated on the mirror of the heart of devotees and extinguishes their burning fire of worldly suffering. It sheds the cool of moonlight upon them. It is the taste of nectar of divine bliss and thus engulfs the entire self of the devotee. Lord Jagannath is dynamic. He moves. He dances. He loves. He plays on his eternal flute. He grows. He flows forth in exuberance and fullness of perfection. He expands, yet He is always new.

A liberated devotee attains nearness of Him and becomes an eternal partner: "Oh! Lord Jagannath! Lord of the Universe. I have no desire for wealth. All that I desire is that birth after birth, I

should have ceaseless devotion for you."

Rathajatra festival of Jagannath is part of the Vaishnava tradition or the cult of 'Bhakti', which received an impetus after the advent of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This tradition attached no importance to the caste system and allowed people of all castes from Brahmins to Shudra to sit and eat together. It was a departure from the orthodox culture. In the Bhakti dispensation, on the other hand, not only all castes but all men and women are treated as equal. It is this tradition of equality of all that is at its best in the festival of chariot of Lord Jagannath.

The Hindu community of Bangladesh will celebrate Rathajatra in a befitting manner today throughout the country. The main programmes of Rathajatra will be held at Dhamrai, Dhaka and at Chittagong. These chariots will move with colorful procession. The Rathajatra will be followed by Uthorath festival to be celebrated seven days after. Rathajatra is also a festival of peace and friendship. It is a celebration of equality protesting all sorts of injustice and inequality. May the shower of divine blessing fall upon all. Rathajatra greetings to all.

Prem Ranjan Dev is president, Bangladesh National Hindu Council.

