

From hero to zero



M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

WHILE addressing the BNP's National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting, held after five years, on August 26 at the Prodhon Mantri Bhaban at Sher-e-Banglanagar, Dhaka and attended by the party's standing committee members, the party chairperson's advisory council members, executive committee members, MPs and presidents and general secretaries of the front organisations, Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia reportedly pointed to the senior leaders of the party and told them: "You are heroes when you are in BNP but you could be zeroes when you are not in the party."

Many political observers are of the opinion that the BNP chairperson made such rude remarks about the senior leaders when many members of the NEC (particularly the young ones) and the grassroots level leaders complained against a few ministers for not caring about the party activists, and demanded immediate expulsion of some senior leaders from the party for criticising Tarique Rahman, Begum Zia's eldest son and senior joint general secretary of the party.

The media reports suggest that the Young Turks, under the leadership of the senior joint secretary general Tarique Rahman, were in total control of the NEC meeting of the party. The deliberations of the meeting were planned and the list of the speakers was carefully prepared in advance through a selection process about which nobody knew anything. The media

BARE FACTS

Politics has become a lucrative business in the country. Election as an MP or appointment as a minister brings a politician money, power, influence, and social prestige. So, the senior leaders do not want to enter into any conflict with the young leadership to risk their political career. Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's warning to the senior leaders of the BNP regarding their turning to zeroes from heroes when out of the party was apparently a strategy to prevent the emergence of any more dissidents like Oli Ahmad.

reports reveal that leaders from at least 41 districts including some important ones like Chittagong, Comilla, Noakhali, Manikganj, Rangpur, and Faridpur were not allowed to address the meeting.

Anyhow, the salient points which were made by the speakers in open deliberations and in the closed door session of the meeting may be listed as follows:

- Resolving internal feuds in the BNP before the next general election.
- Taking action against those who were violating party discipline, in particular expelling dissident leaders Oli Ahmad, a member of the standing committee, and Ashraf Hossain, a joint secretary general, from the party.
- Taking action against the corrupt leaders.
- Curbing prices of essential commodities on an urgent basis, particularly before the holy Ramadan, if the party wanted to win the next election.
- Loss of image of the party due to crossfire by Rab.
- Favouring inclusion of the JP (Ershad) in the alliance, and empowering the party chairperson to take the final decision on the issue.
- BNP means the Zia family, and anybody speaking against this family should be expelled from the party.

Available information reveals that some senior leaders of the BNP, including its secretary general and LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, requested the grassroots

level leaders not to talk about the price hike of essential commodities, electricity crisis, and corruption by some ministers, lawmakers, and important leaders of the party.

The BNP high-ups may conveniently avoid discussion on price spiral of essentials, electricity crisis, and unbridled corruption. But will the people, particularly the poor and the fixed wage earners, forget how the price spiral of essentials resulting from a high inflationary rate, syndication by importers close to the ruling alliance, and extortion by ruling party goons have made their lives miserable?

Will the people ever forget how the corruption of the ruling BNP leaders, including ministers and lawmakers, and their men in the administration caused the country to be rated by the Berlin-based Transparency International (TI) as the most corrupt in the world during all the past four years of the BNP-led alliance rule? This has tarnished the image of their beloved country at home and abroad.

How will the people forget the Kansat killing of innocent farmers for demanding electricity for irrigating their lands to cultivate boro rice? The NEC meeting of the BNP has made it crystal clear that the Young Turks in the BNP, led by its senior joint secretary general Tarique Rahman, are gaining momentum fast and they seem to be impatient to take over control of the organisation during the course of the ensuing election, much to the disquiet of the senior leaders.

One Dhaka daily (The Bangladesh Today) has written that

the single spectacular outcome of the meeting was that through it Tarique Rahman emerged as the second top-most BNP leader, with some speakers even visualising him as the future prime minister of the country. Some speakers pointed out that Tarique Rahman had reorganised the party and turned it into a grassroots force during the last five years.

Insiders have, however, hinted that in the matter of party nominations for election, many of the incumbents may be left out to accommodate new faces chosen by Tarique Rahman. On this issue serious discord may creep up between the old and new forces in the party. Even Khaleda Zia may also be dragged into the matter as the old leaders are most likely to take refuge under her wings.

Excepting dissident leader Oli Ahmad, who has so far strongly opposed the taking over of the party's leadership by the Young Turks led by Tarique Rahman, severely criticised "the adulterators, corrupt leaders, and haughty plunderers" of the party, and rebuffed Khaleda Zia's warning to the senior leaders, stating that he was a liberation war hero and that BNP did not make him a hero. Other senior leaders, who are divided into several groups, are tight-lipped.

Now the question may arise as to why the senior leaders are tight-lipped and are unwilling to enter into any conflict with the young leadership of the party.

First, many of the BNP leaders, including ministers, lawmakers, and important party members know

that they are not clean. They have amassed huge wealth during the last four plus years of the BNP-led alliance rule. The party high command is fully aware of this and that is why the BNP has refrained from taking any legal measures to fulfill its 2001 election pledge for the disclosure of assets and properties of all elected people's representatives, including the prime minister, ministers, and others with the rank and status of minister.

Second, politics has become a lucrative business in the country. Election as an MP or appointment as a minister brings a politician money, power, influence, and social prestige. So, the senior leaders do not want to enter into any conflict with the young leadership to risk their political career. Senior leaders like Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqui and Moudud Ahmed reportedly spoke very highly of Tarique Rahman, apparently to secure their political future, many believe.

Third, some senior leaders are eager to fully establish their sons in politics while they (senior leaders) are active in politics. Some political observers feel that this eagerness has influenced Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman to continue to play along. There are reports that Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar is eager to see his son replace him as MP in his constituency. So he has been playing want many see as a blatantly partisan role in running the parliament to please the BNP high-ups. It may not be difficult to find more such cases in the near future.

To conclude, Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's warning to the senior leaders of the BNP regarding their turning to zeroes from heroes when out of the party was apparently a strategy to prevent the emergence of any more dissidents like Oli Ahmad. Only time will tell as to what extent the strategy, or warning, actually works.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal - is a former Secretary to the government.

Mother Teresa: The living saint

FATHER PATRICK GOMES

MOTHER Teresa has been called a "Living Saint" because of her active charity rendered to the poor and the destitute. While she was on earth, Mother Teresa was endowed with divine inspiration. Because of love with mercy and compassion the Mother's only motto was charity in service, in other words, active charity. The whole world was so much inspired by her active charity that it attributed to her the title "living saint." Yesterday, September 5, we commemorated her passing away. On this day in 1997 the whole world gathered in Calcutta to pay tribute to the her.

Who is a saint? A saint is a charismatic person who is filled with the divine spirit dedicating his/her life to God and the people. This is consecration, this is sacrifice. A saint is most happy to do that through works of mercy and charity.

The world very spontaneously called Mother Teresa a "saint." The world witnessed her deep spirituality, a life of prayer seeking union with the Lord. Mother Teresa followed the ideals of Jesus. Of the eight Beatitudes the Mother's direct focus was on: Blessed are those who are merciful; Blessed are those who are pure in heart; Blessed are those who make peace.

These were ideals for the Mother. People are called to live on ideals; and when we are alive on ideals, we are on duty. Further, an ideal makes us live by attitude from which an action comes forth. For example, prayer is an action, prayerfulness is an attitude. Mother Teresa being endowed with the spirit of God and the attitude of prayer was spiritually driven to be a person of prayer, a person totally of and for God. And only a person whose life is deeply rooted in God and His teaching can lead a life of Beatitudes.

To lead a life of Beatitudes, Mother Teresa consecrated her life to God and humanity embracing three religious vows: Consecrated Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience. With this religious consecration as her only vocation and with the attitude of prayer, mercy, and charity, Mother Teresa was led by divine inspiration to put into action her attitude and consecration and with God's grace and providence began her works of mercy and charity among the poor, the afflicted, the orphan, the dying, the unloved, the illegitimate. This was her very embryonic but extremely revolutionary beginning.

Her universal love and charity had no border or boundary. She went to the streets, to the "bustees," to which Alex replies, bravura style: "I'll remove myself!" And he storms off the plane, along with some lucky souls who are scared by his outburst. Moments later, the plane is in the air, and even fewer moments afterwards, it explodes. Death does not take a holiday, and eventually all the survivors get their comeuppance in maximal gory fashion.

If Alex Browning were of a darker hue and had a Muslim-sounding name, the sum result of his freak-out could very well be deep incarceration. The Center for Constitutional Rights might still be suing for his release today. These are the realities of air travel in this eco-system of fear.

Naem Mohaiemen is a film-maker and media activist. Additional research for this essay was done by Anjali Kamat.



embraced because of and in order to love, a love in action of charity. Thus with her chastity, poverty and obedience to the will of God and to the "will," "call," and "needs" of the suffering humanity Sister Teresa became Mother Teresa to all with her spiritual and universal motherliness.

A movement faces challenges and risks. Withstanding many trials, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, even sometimes rejections, Mother Teresa moved forward with her convictions that what she was doing was according to the plan of God. God never wants humanity to be enslaved by sin, sufferings and afflictions. Mother was very much firm in her conviction and so by God's grace she faced and overcame challenges. Thousands of calls came to her from different parts of the world to bring her charity and love to the poor.

Mother Teresa's movement of charity and her option for the poor had miraculous effects: peace and joy. According to her the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is peace and joy. Wherever the Mother and her Missionaries of Charity were and are, there were and are these visible fruits.

Mother Teresa came to Bangladesh, opened different houses in Dhaka city and in other towns and villages where Missionary Sisters are continuing with the tasks of charity. The nature of the Sisters' charitable works in Bangladesh are: caring for the sick and the afflicted; caring and loving the children many of whom are unwanted or found on the streets; caring and loving the mentally and physically retarded. Sisters go to the poorest of the poor. Initiated by the Mother, the whole life style of the Missionaries of Charity manifest total commitment and dedication to love and service to the poor. And in Bangladesh it is a challenging ideal, to be inspired and followed by all.

Beginning from state authorities

to the least counted in the society and family we all speak from a pulpit about love and charity. We advise others using attractive words to be dedicated, to be followers of people like Mother Teresa and be in action with selfless service. But Mother's life brings us to our conscience and authentic question: how much, as heads of social, political, educational, religious institutions are we inspired by the exemplary life or lives? Do we practice what we preach from the stage?

Bangladesh needs today dedicated people who are ready to serve the poor, the sick, the unloved unconditionally, expecting no reward or recognition in return. When we, rarely though, do experience this love and service, we are attracted and amazed by that. Hopefully, still we experience in some dispensaries, schools and colleges the same love in action and service that Mother Teresa began in this world. So all the values are not lost yet.

Serving God becomes a reality by serving man. Jesus says that whatsoever we do to the least of our brothers, that we do unto Him. When we give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter to the homeless, visit the prisoners and care for the sick, we serve God. And thereby we become worthy to enter the Kingdom of God, heaven.

As we commemorate the death of Mother Teresa, let us not only pay our tribute with flowers, but also be inspired to love and serve the poor in action wherever we are and whatever circumstance we are in. Let us be inspired by her ideals, by her life totally consecrated for God and for the poor. Let us ask a realistic question to ourselves: Do we have enough compassion and feelings for the poor and the destitute who are around us? Let us take some action-plan and implement that through selfless service.

Snakes on, Arabs off the plane

NAEEM MOHAEMEN

IN these times of hyper-paranoia, passengers are more likely to accept snakes on a plane than Arab-looking men.

On August 12, Iraqi peace activist Raed Jarrar was at JFK airport when he was forced to remove a T-shirt he was wearing that said We will not be silent in Arabic and English. JetBlue and airport security officials informed Jarrar that he would not be permitted to board his flight home to California unless he complied. In an astonishing exchange, one officer said to him, "You can't wear a T-shirt with Arabic script and come to an airport. It is like wearing a T-shirt that reads 'I am a robber' and going to a bank."

The offending T-shirt was designed in 2005 by New York-based Artists Against War. The slogan derives from the White Rose dissident group that opposed Nazi rule in Germany. The T-shirts have been seen widely in the United States at various events and until the

incident at JFK, were not considered a "threat to public safety."

As the media started dissecting the incident, one of the things that came to mind is the manner in which popular culture has been signaling our nation's level of hyper-paranoia. Take "Snakes On a Plane," the uber-hyped, internet-propelled, buzz film of 2006. Long before the film even opened, internet discussion of the film was at a fever pitch and the studio capitalized by adding scenes in response.

When you leave the theater, think of the film as a metaphor for the expansive paranoia that has gripped air travel. If it's not snakes on your screen, it's real Arabs or Muslims biting you as you sit waiting for takeoff. Overwhelmed by the fear that the dark-skinned fellow in Seat 3B is not just looking for a snack as he rifles through his bag, passengers have become the new enforcers on our flights.

Ultimately, this is not a security conversation -- it is about enabling individuals to act out their fantasies as "terrorist spot-

ters." Every person is now a potential Action Hero, ready to pounce on evildoers. Even after everyone makes their way through security checks, passengers are often indulged when they spot "suspicious" behavior, kick up a royal fuss and boot someone off the plane.

When you begin targeting behavior and facial tics, are passengers passive actors in all this, or do they trigger behavior modification and self-censorship? This is partially debated by Bernard Harcourt in his forthcoming book "Against Prediction: Profiling, Policing and Punishing in an Actuarial Age."

Suspicious behavior has expanded to include not smiling (the Syrian musician case), going to the bathroom repeatedly (the two Indian men detained soon after 9/11), changing seats and using cell phones (Amsterdam-Bombay flight scare), wearing heavy clothing (Malaga-Manchester flight, shades of Jean Charles de Menezes who was wearing a heavy coat when British police officers shot and

killed him), wearing hijab (JFK detentions), wearing an Arabic T-shirt (JetBlue's fracas with Raed Jarrar), and speaking "Arabic" (Malaga-Manchester again). In the last instance, mob rule forced two men off a Manchester flight. The men in question were Asian and were most likely speaking Urdu.

One of my innocent pleasures are horror films. Take the first installment in the Final Destination franchise; the protagonist, Alex Browning, sees a vision of an airline crash and freaks out, thereby saving the lives of a group of passengers who get off the plane.

For anyone who already suffers from fear of flying, the accelerating nervousness displayed in the pivotal scene is true to life.

Browning: "I saw it. Like, I don't know I just saw it. I saw it on the runway, I saw it take off. I saw out my window. I saw the ground. And -- and the cabin starts to shake, right? And the left side blows up and the whole plane just explodes! And it was so real, just how everything happens, you

know?" Browning's revelation is not taken well by the flight attendants, who threaten to remove him from the aircraft.

To which Alex replies, bravura style: "I'll remove myself!"

And he storms off the plane, along with some lucky souls who are scared by his outburst. Moments later, the plane is in the air, and even fewer moments afterwards, it explodes. Death does not take a holiday, and eventually all the survivors get their comeuppance in maximal gory fashion.

If Alex Browning were of a darker hue and had a Muslim-sounding name, the sum result of his freak-out could very well be deep incarceration. The Center for Constitutional Rights might still be suing for his release today. These are the realities of air travel in this eco-system of fear.

Naem Mohaiemen is a film-maker and media activist. Additional research for this essay was done by Anjali Kamat.

Ruthless political expediency

KAZI SM KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

AS a gigantic step towards retaining the support of the religion-based political parties and their vote-banks, the government recently announced that the highest degree awarded by the Qawami madrasa would be equated with the Masters degree. The ramifications of the announcement are so far-reaching that many think it will forever change the intellectual superstructure of Bangladesh society. In time, nothing will be the same as before, and everything will change, be it economy, politics, culture, society, civil administration, and law and order.

Arguably, there are serious divides among the religion-based parties in Bangladesh. Even an influential section of religion-based political parties openly denounce the Qawami madrasa education and has termed the government decision to recognise the Dawra degree to be suicidal. Besides, it has become sort of an open secret that during the current regime militant organisations with bases in religious institutions crept up and thrived in connivance with a

section of the government, resulting in an unprecedented level of militant activities.

The damage that militancy has caused will no doubt take a long time to heal. The deadly impact is being felt not only by the government but also by the general people. I, however, don't mean to say that religious education is unnecessary or that madrasa degrees are to be frowned at. I, rather, echo the universal call for its modernisation instead. But, to recognise the degree of the religious education, about which curriculum the government has no clear idea, choice and control, is not only imprudent but also ridiculous.

From an objective point of view, it is kind of recognising the self-proclaimed quality of an unknown quantity. Political ambition is not a vice, but the Mullahs with high political ambitions are adept at tempting the innocent people with assurances of heaven hereafter. However, the underlying scheme of most of them is nothing other than getting hold of state power. And, use of religion as well as fascination for piety among the common men has turned out to be eminently

suitable for them.

Many eminent scientists emerged from religious education in the chequered Islamic history when they were inclined to scientific study of the holy Quran. Once they deviated from scientific study of the same, only clerics have spanned. Islam ordains the Muslims to gather knowledge of the broader world from whatever sources. But, to the Qawami madrasa, even English language is an anathema. Then, how to go ahead in the quest for knowledge and wisdom merely on religious education?

Admittedly, Islamisation of the society gathers steam whenever a military government tries to buy legitimacy as has been experienced in Pakistan and Bangladesh for long. But, this tendency is not less popular with democratic governments in Bangladesh either. And as another dose of Islamisation, PM Khaleda Zia equated the Qawami madrasa's Dawra degree with Masters. She, however, only made the announcement, leaving the responsibility of implementing it on the next government, whichever party may form it, or even on the caretaker government.

What a neatly orchestrated political expediency! Just a hasty declaration with no immediate hazards of execution and so many votes in the bag well in advance! So what of that if the country pays by the nose in the not-too-distant future for this reckless move? After all, nothing is illegitimate in the dirty game of politics! And, what makes it all the more excruciating is that this "Islamisation" was not done for the purpose of glorifying Islam as a great religion but simply for populism. Interestingly, however, even Awami League did not contradict the decision to obviate anti-AL propaganda.

In 1977, during the regime of General Zia, a martial law proclamation obliterated secular face of the constitution and inserted a phrase that a fundamental state principle is "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah." The phrase "Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim" was inserted before the preamble of the constitution. The change was later legitimised through the 5th amendment in 1979.

Another military dictator, General Ershad, in his desperate bid to get cheap popularity, made the 8th amendment to the constitution in

1988, recognising Islam as the state religion. And, all this happened as if Bangladeshis were less Muslims before the fifth and eighth amendments. May I, however, ask what extra benefits Muslims received from those alterations in the constitution? The said amendments to the constitution were just subterfuges of the then military dictators to play on the sentiments of the Muslims.

Though those didn't bring any good to the Muslims, the scar they left on the people of other faiths is difficult to heal. They also created sort of a value conflict in the predominantly secular social setting. Even the Muslims at large believe that those moves were highly fortuitous. However, as happened to the constitutional amendments, future governments -- even secular -- are unlikely to even review this not-well-thought-out Islamisation in fear of orchestrated reactions and, in our country, therein lies the vulnerability of rationality vis-a-vis political expediency.

Kazi SM Khasrul Alam Quddusi is Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong.

LEST WE FORGET

Professor Noman: My idol, my guide

MOHAMMAD MOFAKKER

PROFESSOR Noman was a born teacher. The reputation commanded by Prof. Noman in the country's educational arena was enviable. He was a real architect of building worthy men. To each of his students he was a friend, philosopher and guide. Prof. Noman believed that an ideal teacher would rise above all narrow things and would set the trend of a wise, sophisticated, capable and dedicated soul, who would nourish and enrich its knowledge through his own wisdom, initiative and research work, and who would unveil newer horizons of knowledge. And to him an ideal student was one who would combine in himself the inherent traits of modern values, honesty, diligence, dynamism, devotion and the thirst for knowledge and be responsive to the society at large.

Just after obtaining the Master of Arts degree, he started his career as a teacher in the English Department of Dhaka University. Later he switched over to government college. Initially he served at Chittagong and Rajshahi government colleges, but most of his teaching career was spent at Dhaka College where he was professor and head of department of English and, finally, the principal.

Professor Noman's name thus became synonymous with the traditionally famous Dhaka College.

At the last phase of his life Prof Noman again returned to university. He shouldered the very heavy responsibilities as treasurer and then as Vice-chancellor of Jahangirnagar University.

Today, we hardly find a dedicated and popular teacher like Professor Noman, who commanded full confidence of students. It was as if he knew the magic of spell-binding the students. Professor Noman was a real golden man and, coming in touch with him, the students became golden souls themselves. A multitude of his students are now well-established at various spheres of national life. To most of them, Professor Noman

remains the best teacher of their lives while they pride themselves as his disciples. And to many of them, Professor Noman remains a guide and guardian.

I was his student at Dhaka College. My five brothers were all his direct students at the same college. And to all of us, Professor Noman was the best teacher of our life -- not considered on a family basis, but in the most impartial sense of the term. His class-lectures placed a spell-binding effect on the students because of his pleasant delivery, appropriate coinage of words and absorbing explanations and commentaries. Those pleasant memories are still engraved in our hearts. And, beyond the classrooms, his speeches at different seminars and meetings were fiery, full of wisdom and thought-provoking.

It would be very difficult to find a teacher as sympathetic, as friendly and as devoted as Professor Noman was. His students were the prime investment of his life and all his attention and thoughts were directed towards providing ideal education to them. And as the dividend of his investment, he received and is still receiving even after his death the unqualified love and respect from his students. In 1970, Professor Noman was honoured with the Best Teacher Award by the then Pakistan government. The Bangladesh government also honoured him by conferring the Ekushey Award in 1994 in recognition of his contributions to education.

Prof. Noman was a true patriot pursuing democratic norms and sentiments. He had a deep love and respect for the soil and the people of the country. It was his life-long ideal to put the interests of the country and its people above everything else.

Prof. Noman was a freedom fighter, too. The Pakistan occupation army entered his residence with order to kill him. But by the grace of the Almighty, he was spared and the killing forces left the house after looting money and golden ornaments. He had a direct and effective role in organising the

war of liberation in his village area. When he was a resident of the Hatirpool area in Dhaka, he used to help the freedom fighters with financial assistance and moral encouragement. He also provided his personal car for the use of freedom fighters in various operations.

Prof. Noman had helped the eminent organisers of the war of liberation like Prof. Rehman Sobhan, Prof. Anisur Rahman, Barrister Moudud Ahmed and renowned painter and cultural personality Mostafa Monwar by providing them with lodging at his village home and assisting them to secretly cross the border through Brahmanbaria. These events are mentioned in the History of the Bangladesh War of Liberation edited by poet Hasan Hafizur Rahman.

True Prof. Noman hailed from an elite family, held high positions and was honoured with many awards. But, those were only the secondary elements of his life, as man he was much bigger than the credentials.

And he was a teacher par excellence. Teaching was not only his profession, it was his real passion. He was also a cultured, tolerant and refined gentleman.

On his receiving the Ekushey Award for outstanding contributions in the field of education in 1994, Professor Noman was given a civic reception by the Bancharampur Thana Association in Dhaka. Speaking on the occasion eminent researcher and civil servant AKM Zakaria said, "Had there been any award for 'perfect gentlemen' in Bangladesh, Professor Noman would undoubtedly have been the first man to win the award." I take it as the most appropriate assessment of Prof. Noman.

On his death anniversary today we solemnly pray to Almighty Allah to treat Noman Bhai with greater honour in heavens, than what had been bestowed upon him in this world.

Ameen.

Mohammad Mofakker is Secretary, Bangladesh University Grants Commission.