

Pakistan: Testing Time for Democracy

Teaching the Teachers

The first teachers' training college in the country under private initiative and management was opened last week in Dhaka. That no less a person than M Ferdous Khan is associated with the undertaking as the chairman of its managing committee should encourage one to take the endeavour seriously.

Although the first teachers' training college was established in Dhaka way back in 1904, the quality of education offered in the classroom has remained unenviable for a long time and has deteriorated progressively over the years. While the emphasis has always been on recruiting a trained teacher, facilities for training a goodly share of in-service teachers and aspirants to the calling has remained far short of adequate. Then there was always the question of effectiveness of the training. Unappreciated by almost all educated people, the teachers training course is a tough high-minded and incidentally very foreign big big thing that must be pushed down the gullet of the unfortunate and unwilling teacher in only ten months. Many come out successful — and not a few of them with impressive results — or the training establishments would cease to exist. The point is that B Ed and M Ed teachers are not necessarily good teachers in spite of their pedagogical diplomas. As with almost all students of this nation very few take anything of what they learn in their classes and from their text books beyond the place and time of their studentship. And teachers are no exception.

Then, of course, there is the big question of the whole of what is imparted in the training courses being very largely, if not totally, irrelevant to the situation prevailing in the schools and colleges. A long awaited educational reforms is not anywhere round the corner and, as things are, there is little scope of practising what the teacher has learnt in the training colleges.

There is even a bigger question — the question of the teacher's motivation, his or her leading a life of principles, a life that never stops in its zest for knowledge and an inner compulsion of sharing it. With everything else in the country, the calling of a teacher also has slid down abysmally.

There is now good and secured monetary returns in education. And there is also some competition with access to more money as the prize. But all this is proving futile in a system that drives out any need for true teaching and learning and replaces it with the examinees needing only to vomit certain set answers to certain known questions having nothing to do with any knowledge of the subject. The circumstances in the schools and colleges compel a teacher to become, fast and sure, a manipulator of extra-pedagogical things and a little monster of a dictator to the students. How can this situation be helped?

We insist that the teachers themselves, specially their professional and trade-union associations, lead the way to finding effective answers to the quandary. If even everything else fails, the teacher alone would be called to be a true teacher simply because he is a teacher and not a mere cog in the mindless massive wheel called the educational establishment. And there is no reason why he or she cannot be a wonderful teacher in spite of an array of stupendous impediments, only if he or she earnestly wills to be one. Can training be helpful in inculcating such a will in the teacher-students? If it cannot, it better may not be there.

We welcome the new college and hope many more of such would grow.

Tribute to a Pioneer

Political parties in Britain have paid their due tributes this week to Dadabhai Nowroji, a Parsee from Bombay, who became the first Indian to be elected to the House of Commons, just a century ago. In commemorating the centenary of this unique event — the admission of a coloured colonial subject in the British Parliament — educated elite in the United Kingdom rightly recognise Nowroji's great qualities and political judgement. All historical records suggest that instead of becoming a "brown Sahib," he remained an Indian and quietly threw his support behind the cause of self rule of his ancestral country. To what extent the British electorate cared for his concern for India's future is debatable. In fact, he won his seat by an extremely narrow majority. However, what endeared the Parsee to the local people was his commitment to women's rights in Britain.

If, a century ago, the achievement of Nowroji was remarkable, Britain cannot feel all that pleased with what Asians have done so far in entering the mainstream politics in the United Kingdom. At this moment, we have just three South Asians elected to the House of Commons during the last polls, a marginal increase over the number elected in the earlier election. This hardly reflects nearly ten per cent of Asians of the total British population today.

This should not be a number game. What is important is to give Britons of Asian origin, especially of the second generation, an increased sense of participation in the United Kingdom's way of life, including politics, arts and media. In trade and commerce, a section of South Asians have done well. It is said that the two main political parties, the ruling Tory and the opposition Labour, have not gone out of their way to identify prospective Asian candidates for the parliament, except in constituencies which contain sizable voters from this region. However, local Asian social leaders, with political inclinations, must come forward and demonstrate their commitment to the welfare of people they live with and whom they can serve as MPs. With ethnic and religious differences now under severe strains, in Britain as well as in West European countries, an increased participation of forward-looking non-white immigrants in British politics, at all different levels, will serve as a good tribute to Dadabhai Nowroji.

Daily Star (DS): What are your views on the performance of the Nawaz Sharif government?

Benazir Bhutto (BB): The performance is judged by political, economic growth or international standing of a government. On all these three counts, this government has failed. Right now about 25% of Pakistan — that is the province of Sindh — has been handed over to the military. It has been discovered that members of the government (One of the coalition partners — the MQM) were presiding over torture chambers, mass graves, kidnapping people and murdering their opponents. Despite this neither the president nor the prime minister has acted. He's arresting members of my party but he has failed to take action against a party which has armed cadres and was involved in terrorism and

DS: This is before the army action?
BB: No even now. The President dismissed my government on charges of horse-trading — that is to say, 3 members of the IJI (the current ruling coalition) crossed over and were supporting us at a time when there was a no-confidence vote. The vote was defeated at that time.

Now here is a party indulging in murder, terrorism and hanging its opponents and the president is failing to take any action. So there is total political chaos. Every effort of the opposition to have a national consensus or have an understanding on vital issues with the government has been spurned aside in preference for victimization against the top leadership of Pakistan Peoples Party and economic and political victimization of its workers. Some people have been put behind bars for two years. Just yesterday the court acquitted 4 of our people in a case of murdering a judge. If our people are innocent, then who murdered the judge?

Economically, the deficit has widened. Pakistan's inflation rate has more than doubled. People are groaning under the weight of unemployment. No major industrialization has taken place. They say we had a 40% rate of industrialization of private enterprise. No, they just took the public sector at throw away prices and gave it to the private sector. Everytime there is a bid by somebody they don't like they just cancel the bid. They change the criteria and give it to their favourite few. We have taken a decision that wherever an economic crime against the nation has been committed that act will be nullified.

DS: That is, when you come to power?
BB: Of course we will come to power. The people of this country are with us. How long can they deny fair and free elections? Fair and free elections will have to come today or tomorrow or the day after. They will have to come and when they do — I have no doubt that the PPP will sweep the elections — because, what is the IJI? The IJI is the creation of intelligence agencies of the Zia era. IJI is full of people of the Zia era who have no roots among the masses, who are adventurers, opportunists, self seekers — banded together for the common pursuit — to prevent the rule of law from taking place here so that their days of adventurism and carpet bagging can go on.

DS: How did your government lose power?
BB: As far as my government's overthrow is concerned the Prime Minister's Special Assistant, Chowdhury Nissar, has himself said it was planned by Gen. Beg. (Gen. Aslam Beg, the former Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army, who has now been replaced by Gen. Asif Nawaz)

DS: Would you please elaborate this point?
BB: Chowdhury Nissar, said that it is no secret that Gen. Beg delivered the MQM votes to the IJI during the no-confidence vote. In other words Nawaz Sharif, with the tacit consent of the President, conspired to overthrow the legally elected government of Pakistan through a no-confidence move and subsequently through other moves. During the time that I was Prime Minister, masked men would appear and shoot people dead on the streets, in buses, railways. We suspect that these masked people belonged to this terrorist organisation called MQM. We tried to arrest them, then they would seek refuge in Punjab (then under the control of IJI, with Nawaz Sharif as the Chief Minister). So MQM was able to destabilize my government, and get refuge in Punjab.

Internationally, US aid is suspended. The Central Asian Republic presidents have more often gone to India than they have come to Pakistan. There is a possibility that US may declare Pakistan a terrorist state. Relations with India are at a low ebb.

So whether one judges politically, economically and on the basis of international standing, this government has failed. This government cannot succeed because it is a government of intrigue and conspiracy. A government that committed high treason to overthrow the legally elected government, and subsequently rigged the election.

DS: How do you see the events unfolding? What will happen now?

BB: What will happen depends on what the different players do. There are three options. Option One is that the government tries to have an understanding with all the political parties to save the political system. For that the government will have to agree to form a national government and agree to hold elections within an agreed time-frame — 3 months, 9 months, 1 year.

Failing which there is option two. The President constitutionally can dissolve the assembly on grounds of corruption, lawlessness, etc and form a national government himself. Constitutionally the President can do it — it may not be democratic.

And failing that, the country is on a down slide and heading towards a military intervention. I hope it does not come to that. If it does, then the responsibility for it will rest with the Prime Minister and the President.

DS: Given the feeling and impressions you have of this government — as you have expressed in the interview — you are still willing to sit with this government if they stop, what you term as, persecuting.....

BB: I am a political person. Yes, because in life one has to deal with the realities that are there. You may not like them. But then history demands of us, expectations of our people demand of us, that we do not follow our narrow likes and dislikes. But we search how our objectives can be attained.

DS: Going back a bit, you said the MQM votes in the no-confidence vote against you were delivered to the IJI coalition by Gen. Aslam Beg.

BB: I am not saying it. The Special Assistant to the Prime Minister is saying it.

DS: My question is, was that act by Gen. Beg, a personal thing or was he representing the wishes of the armed forces?

BB: I have no idea. I know that I was very popular among the lower ranks of the armed forces.

There was such a propaganda carried out against myself and my party — that we sold out to the Americans, that we sold out to the Indians and that we were traitors and that we must

Benazir Bhutto was bitter about the way she was dismissed from power. She was furious about the way Nawaz Sharif's government was harassing her and her family. She was extremely critical of the political developments and fearful for the future of democracy in Pakistan. And she expressed it all during her hour long interview with Mahfuz Anam, Executive Editor of The Daily Star at Bilawal House, her residence that also serves as her office.

Once the youngest Prime Minister of Pakistan and the first woman to become head of a government in a Muslim country, Benazir Bhutto looked like a leader who felt that time was in her favour. Exuding confidence, she expressed her hope of winning a free and fair election — when, and if it comes.

go. At the same time, it was said that we were corrupt, that my husband was Mr. Ten Percent — all this resulted in a change of mood. Newspaper advertisements were taken out that we bought poisoned milk, that we poisoned little babies and killed them to make money. This was done by the Chief Minister of Punjab, spending public money. The propaganda blitz changed the mood.

DS: Coming back to the domestic scene. The IJI, as you said, was formed by Zia (Gen Ziaul Huq, former President of Pakistan)

BB: No, no, the IJI was formed by the DG — ISI (Director-General, Inter Service Intelligence), of the Zia era. The DG-ISI later told me, and to Air Marshal Zulfikar, our Ambassador to Washington, that President Zia had given him the task to form the IJI.

DS: We have also read that MQM was formed by the army intelligence service to erode PPP's hold in Sindh. So my question is there seems to be a pattern in the army action, which indicates they are against the PPP coming to power.

BB: What has to be understood is that during Zia's time, several institutions were brought together to create a constituency for himself. Zia was the chief of the army. As the President he was chief of the civilian bureaucracy. He cultivated a group of politicians, like Nawaz Sharif. He won over the mullahs by making use of Zakat fund — all together they all became Zia constituency based on greed and opportunism.

After I became Prime Minister, there was a break in that constituency. Armed Forces Chief was no longer the President. Of course there are still people within the armed forces who are of the Zia era, and who are suspicious of the PPP. But sufficient time has past since 1988, for the armed forces to have become neutral. Army is out of power.



"Fundamentalists want to keep the Muslim countries backward... I want to put forward a different face of Islam — face of liberty, advancement and dignity. I'm an Islamic Social Democrat."



General Asif Nawaz, the present Chief of Staff has distanced the armed forces from muckraking. When I was in power Gen. Beg used to hold Corp Commanders meeting practically every month as a psychological weapon against me. He used to come and say, "many of my Generals want to declare martial law" and used to give oracle-type pronouncement in public which could be taken both as a support for or opposition to my government. So I was always living under a shadow. It was a psychological game played with me. I was pregnant and I was living under a situation when my armed forces chief was telling me martial law was imminent. Zia had often said he wished he had killed us all in our beds along with my father — and of course Mujib was killed in bed along with his family. So I had the fear that we could be slaughtered and as a mother of one child and pregnant with another, it became a worrying time for me. I am grateful to God that I had the strength not to allow them to sidetrack me from what I wanted to do.

DS: What we had read in the paper in Bangladesh was that after President Zia died in the plane crash it was Gen. Beg who kept the army away from intervening. But now you are saying that Gen. Beg was intimidating you all the time and that he was involved in ousting you.

BB: What I am saying is that on 17th Aug 1988 (the day President Zia's plane crashed) the armed forces, indeed had an occasion to declare Martial Law and did not. I was very proud of that fact. They asked for a 'medal of democracy' and I gave them one, for not intervening.

I don't know at what time Gen. Beg was co-opted and started to work against a democratically elected government. What I do know is that Chowdhury Nissar (referred to earlier) come on record to say that Gen. Beg was involved in destabilizing my government. It is a startling, astonishing and shocking revelation, that he committed high treason by conspiring against the elected government of the time.

But this is all in the past. Let us see where Pakistan is today and try to go forward. Pakistan cannot go forward without stable political structures. After I became the Leader of the Opposition, I extended my support to the government, provided they could rise above their narrow interest and think of Pakistan. I did so, only to strengthen the democratic system.

DS: There was a lot of talk about corruption, inefficiency and nepotism during your Prime Ministership. Your in-laws were mentioned, including your father-in-law. Was it all propaganda, or were there some mistakes made?

BB: I believe that I worked to the best of my ability. I worked for 24 hours a day. I cared neither for my personal happiness, nor for my life. I cared for Pakistan. I tried to stop corrup-

tion. So they countered by accusing me of corruption. They accused my husband of corruption — not my in-laws.

DS: Your father-in-law was mentioned by name.

BB: Because he became chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Where are the cases against him? There is one that says, he has a petrol pump, which is not according to the "naksha" (plan). Even if we take at the face value — is that corruption?

They said we had US 80 million dollars in Hong Kong Shanghai Bank of Dubai. No such bank existed in Dubai when anti-corruption team was sent.

DS: But allegations of corruption against your government continued?

BB: Because we were young, we were glamorous. Because we had charisma. When you have such mass appeal, or popularity, people want to hear about you — whether in Pakistan, England or America. And nobody wants to hear good things. They want to hear something scandalous. And since in Pakistan you cannot have scandals of romance you have scandals of money. And people lapped it up. We kept on saying, where is the proof? After being thrown out of power, several cases were instituted against my husband. He has been acquitted of five. There are two cases now pending against him — and they are not of corruption.

Why should we be corrupt. Popular leaders can't afford to be corrupt. Because they have to go to the people.

DS: But there have been instances.....

BB: I don't buy that. There is power and there is popularity. People in power — yes they make fortunes. Because they don't have popularity. They don't have public adulation. They don't have stature among the population that they can lose. But people who are popular leaders have a lot to lose. I would be surprised



to learn that popular leaders become corrupt. And what can you take to the grave with you except your dignity and self respect.

DS: So what is your answer to the charges of corruption?

BB: They are baseless false, concocted malafide — made up by a clique of corrupt people who have plundered this nation.

DS: Some people perceive you to be arrogant. Your style of doing things is supposed to be authoritarian? How do you respond to these remarks?

BB: I don't think I am an arrogant person. I am a self-confident person. I have great confidence in my thoughts and in my beliefs. If I come across as arrogant, I would be sorry to be doing so. But what can one do. Different people have different perceptions.

DS: You know that the line between arrogance and being self-confident is a very thin one.

BB: I am not bothered. I know what I am. I do not consider myself arrogant. I do consider myself proud. I have a great sense of pride for this country and a great sense of pride in my own mission. I believe in it.

DS: Let's hear about your mission. What is your mission?

BB: My mission is to transform Pakistan from a backward, stagnant, illiterate slum into a dynamic nation where there is an attempt to eliminate poverty, hunger and want. I want to transform this nation, industrialise it, give the peasants a fair deal and give justice to the people.

Our social structures are corrupt. The entire political system is corrupt. That has to change. I want to give values to people. I have an ideology — Islamic Social Democracy. I am an Islamic Social Democrat. I am against the rise of fundamentalism. I see my mission against fundamentalists who want to maintain status-quo, who want stagnation, who want the Muslim countries go backward. They exploit the natural fear that rises from the changes that are taking place around the world. They want to take people backward, to the altar of their greed. I want to challenge this phenomenon in the entire Muslim world and say that there is another face of Islam — the face of equality, freedom and liberty. The face of dignity. Islam is a great religion not in the sense of the fundamentalists, but in the sense of the reformers.

DS: Why were you accused of selling your country to India? What was your policy that offended your opponents so much?

BB: Because Rajiv Gandhi and I signed three major agreements. First was the non-attack of each others nuclear facilities and there were two other agreements. Things improved between the two countries. We had bilateral exchanges. India is a very volatile subject, and because they were out to destabilize my government, they thought, to say I was anti-Pak-

istani would sell well. Such a slogan will go well with the rank and file of the military. They said that they had a copy of a secret tape between Rajiv and myself in which I was supposed to have said I would do "Rajiv's bidding". If they had such a tape in December 1988 they would have tried me for treason and hang me. And why would I do Rajiv's bidding? Could Rajiv make me the Prime Minister of India — because I was already the Prime Minister of Pakistan? What could he give me?

DS: How do you see the future of our region — future of SAARC?

BB: I would like to see all the SAARC countries do well. I think Pakistan is well placed to play a positive role in moving SAARC ahead. Future of all nations depends on economic performance and political freedom. If a country cannot perform well on economic reforms and political freedom, that country will fall by the way side. I introduced the concept of a common SAARC passport for judges and parliamentarians first, to facilitate people-to-people travel. There are many problems between some SAARC countries — example Pakistan and India. A step by step approach will be successful. Our problems are not going to go away. Let us first tackle the problems that can be tackled.

DS: The question of stranded Pakistanis has been a consistent irritant in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. How do you think it can be solved?

BB: The question is a difficult one because we have a divergence of views on the issue of Biharis who opted for Bangladesh or what was then East Pakistan....

DS: May I correct you on this. There were about 500,000 Pakistanis who opted for Bangladesh after 1971. They have been given Bangladeshi citizenship and integrated into our society. There were another 450,000 Pakistanis who opted for Pakistan after liberation. I am talking about the latter group, not those who opted for Bangladesh....

BB: I am talking about 1947 when we were all one Pakistan. People opted for Pakistan, either going to the eastern wing from areas contiguous to that part or to the western wing from areas contiguous to that wing. There are two perceptions. Of course the Bengalis see it differently....

DS: The question is how do these citizens of Pakistan — Biharis as you call them — how do they see it?

BB: I am not going into how they see the issue. I am only interested in how the Bengalis see it, and how we see it, because many Pakistanis think that it would be a good fortune to go to America (US). But Americans may not like to see them as American citizens....

DS: Are you equating the stranded Pakistanis, with to come to Pakistan, with the wish of Pakistanis wanting to migrate to the US?

BB: I do not wish to equate that. All I am saying is that in 1947... I am giving my view — I already said this question is difficult. I have a great love for the people of Bangladesh and I have a feeling that they are going to be upset by my answer....

DS: Nevertheless, please let me have your answer.

BB: Since 1947 people opted for either the eastern or the western wing of Pakistan depending on from where they came. Subsequently the eastern wing became Bangladesh. People living there, all became Bangladeshis. Some of them may not have wanted the break-up of Pakistan and may have feared for their lives. I think Pakistan already took 1,60,000 Biharis in the 70s and we were told this was the end of the matter.

DS: You do not call them Pakistanis — you call them Biharis.

BB: Yes, I do not call them Pakistanis, I call them Biharis who opted for the eastern wing of Pakistan which subsequently became Bangladesh....

DS: But Pakistan was born in 1947 and Bangladesh 1971, there is a 24 year gap between the two events....

BB: Please let me finish. You are not letting me talk. Let me finish my answers.

We took 1,60,000 Biharis. Then we were told that there were 2,60,000 more Biharis. It is my information that there are 10 lakh Biharis in the camps. I say that Pakistan cannot take 10 lakh Biharis. We cannot even take 5 lakh Biharis. We do not have the money for it, we do not have the structure for it and we do not have the geography for it. All of them came and settled in Karachi and we have ethnic problems. We have the people of Sindh feeling that they are a minority. How would they like if we sent a hoard of people from here to take away their land, their jobs and their water. Nobody wants to turn into a "Red Indian". People of Sindh do not want to become Red-Indians. Today Pakistan's integrity is threatened by wholesale immigration. If I have to choose between wholesale immigration and integrity of Pakistan, I would choose integrity of Pakistan.

I proposed to President Zia and to Rabita-e-Islam that we can't play politics with the Bihari, giving them false hopes.

My position is that let us first have a census and go for a Muslim Ummah solution. Let the Biharis from the camps go to different countries and Pakistan could be happy to take its share so that there is no more Bihari issue. We are prepared to give aid to set up schools, training institutes, anything to make life comfortable. Pakistan can take a certain amount. Where will the rest go?

DS: But these people are not citizens of any other country so that they can migrate to those places.

BB: They are not citizens of Pakistan either. They are Biharis who opted for what is now Bangladesh, but was then Pakistan.

DS: If you became the Prime Minister tomorrow, what steps would you take to solve this problem?

BB: I would have a full census and then ask the Muslim and the non-Muslim countries to solve this problem. I would like to give people a choice. We are becoming global, the meaning of sovereignty is changing. Why can't these — you call them Pakistanis — live somewhere else....

DS: It is they, who call themselves Pakistanis.

BB: Well, whatever. Why can't we have them living all over the world. Why can't we see it as a human problem with the responsibility of all mankind, rather than a problem that is the responsibility of Pakistan.

DS: What is your message to the people of Bangladesh?

BB: We in Pakistan respect you, we in Pakistan have admiration for you, and we in Pakistan have affection for you. We would like to have a close and brotherly relationship with you. We like to see greater interaction and economic cooperation between ourselves.

We respect your independence, we respect your separate identity. You are Bangladeshis and we are Pakistanis.

DS: Thank you very much for this generous share of your time.