

Dynamics of Decision Making

The Osmany Udyan Preservation Case

by Dr Tasneem Siddiqui

OVER the last month, a citizens' movement has emerged centering round the government's decision to construct a convention centre at Osmany Udyan to host a summit of the Non-aligned Movement. We are aware that in a democratic system, the decision making process involves the aggregation of various demands articulated by different sections of the society and skilful selection of the ones that accommodate the interests of the largest number of groups. Again if any decision or action is taken by the policymakers that does not seem to reflect the wishes of a particular section it is very much within democratic practice that those aggrieved will try to convey their disapproval to the decision makers and suggest alternative options. It is in the interest of the policymakers to accommodate or respond to such demands in a responsible way. A political system can only gain strength by constantly adapting to the rational demands of the diverse sections of its polity. Unfortunately, our policymakers do not seem to appreciate the dynamics of such a rational decision making process. It is quite disconcerting to notice the Prime Minister's sharp reaction to the peaceful movement of citizens concerning the protection of the open space at Osmany Udyan.

The government's decision to construct the convention centre for the Non-aligned Movement has raised serious concern among various sections in the community. Initially concerns were expressed by citizens at a private level. Then the print media started publishing pieces on the probable impact of constructing a massive structure at the site situated in the business hub of the city. Concerns have been expressed on the ground that it will lead to felling of many trees harming the Udyan, known as the lungs of the city and the planned construction will increase the traffic problem manifold. It will also add to the already unacceptable level of pollution in that part of the city. Furthermore, the planned move will reduce the poor and middle class people's access to the public park.

Over time, it appeared that the government was not taking the above issues in cognizance and was firm in its decision to go ahead as planned. One would



have hoped that the non-governmental sector of Bangladesh, which has a major environmental component, would mount a campaign against such an environment unfriendly decision of the government. However, individual NGOs or their caucus bodies such as the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB) and Coalition of Environment Network (CEN) were not forthcoming in taking up the issue, for reasons best known to them. In this context, some individuals from different professional background — university teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, youth and student activists — after a series of consultations, decided to form a citizens' group. The group held a citizens' rally at Osmany Udyan as its first public programme. At that rally, the organisers made it clear that they were not against holding of the NAM summit or

building a convention centre for that purpose, but they only wanted to highlight the environmental impact of construction of the structure at Osmany Udyan which they felt was not considered in detail while making the decision. The aim of the citizens' group was to articulate dispersed opinion of individual citizens and put forward itself to be an adversary of the government. It merely wants to articulate wishes of a large number of Dhakaites who are genuinely concerned about the ad-

verse impact of the project on the city environment. It is for this reason one has witnessed wholehearted participation of a cross section of people in the rally and the human-chain organised by the group. The very fact that eminent literatures of the country who are known to be favourably disposed towards the present government, have participated in these programmes along with the masses only shows that it is not a partisan issue. Participation of a few mainstream opposition leaders on their own initiative, demonstrates that the issue is important and has widespread people's support.

The print media provided wide coverage to the programmes of the citizens' movement. The forum's opinion was adequately reflected in their reports. The government had ample opportunity to understand the intent of the group and the support it wields. The Prime Minister has berated the organisers for "criticising her for no reason". It is deeply shocking to note that issues such as lack of open space and the need for greenery in Dhaka city, high level of pollution and traffic congestion, are seen by the honourable Prime Minister as "non-issues". One really feels uncomfortable when the highest executive of the state throws a challenge to the organisers of planting 100 trees each and commits herself personally, to inspect them. However, we, the organisers, would like to take our Prime Minister's proposal in good stride and request her to allow us to begin our tree plantation programme at Osmany Udyan. We are sure that our honourable Prime Minister is well aware that many of us are not fortunate enough to be bestowed with acreage property in which to plant one hundred trees and public space is the only ones that we have access to.

In conclusion, I would urge the Prime Minister to appreciate concerns expressed by ordinary citizens in positive spirit and take necessary steps to shift the convention site from Osmany Udyan. I am sure she will demonstrate her political acumen by favourably responding to this demand.

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The Lure for Immortality

by Dr A H Jaffor Ullah

"In few years from now, Dolly, the cloned sheep, may die of natural causes, but her legacy may live for a long time. Mind that human minds are curious to know the unknowns. Thus, as long as humanity will toy with the idea of achieving immortality, cloning research will continue unabated."

THE newspaper recently blurted out loudly, "Dolly's cloned genes are in bad shape." I suppose the news report is referring to the scientific paper that was published in the vanguard of scientific journal, the Nature.

Dolly, the sheep, was an engineered animal who came into this world some time in 1996. For whatever reasons, unbeknownst to common people, her birth announcement was delayed six months. In early 1997, though, the whole world was told the amazing tale of her birth story — with much fanfare of course. And now after two years come the bombshell.

The newspaper story now tells us a sordid tale of Dolly. The entire humanity was spellbound by her amazing tale of her birth. Now everyone is feeling sorry for Dolly, the engineered sheep. What really went wrong with her birth? We all knew that she was no ordinary sheep. A horrendous sum of money was being spent to engineer Dolly; never mind the scientific hours. Does this mean that all that money and scientific hours were wasted?

Not quite so! The Cell Biologists, Cellular Aging Experts, and a host of scientists from other life sciences background are all learning a thing or two about the way body ages. The scientific jigsaw puzzle, which is in disarray now, will surely get some help from Dolly's unexpected predicament, to say the least. Thus, Dolly's loss of fleeting youth will be the gain for Cell Biology. Although, sheep experts are now pretty much tiptoeing about Dolly's premature demise, they think they will gain new insights as to why cell's age, anyway.

To understand why a sadness has descended upon Dolly's

caretakers' scientists, one has to know the current hypothesis of cellular ageing. But before I get there, let me say this with much trepidation that Dolly was not a baby at all, biologically speaking of course, when she was born. For she was born with cells in her body already aged five long years. Poor Dolly or her creators knew about it then. I bet the team of cell biologists and animal scientists who were instrumental in bringing Dolly, the ewe, to this world now can say that they got their comeuppance.

The Scottish cell biologists who planned the cloning experiments at the Roslin Institute to bring an engineered ewe into this world chose a six-year-old sheep to be the donor of the genetic makeup. That sheep had already spent about 50 per cent of its longevity already. Farm animal experts think the average life span of sheep is about 13 years. The current Associated Press news story of May 27, 1999, did mention that when Dolly's birth was announced with ostentation in early 1997, someone inadvertently had said, "Dolly was a sheep in lamb's clothing." Nothing could have been truer than this.

The Scottish researchers responsible for Dolly's birth and upkeep are now telling the rest of the world that Dolly's genes may already be showing signs of genetic wear and tear. Thus, Dolly may be susceptible to premature aging. By now, the famous sheep has crossed the zenith of her life span. From now it is all but a downhill journey for her.

This unexpected finding that cloning a whole animal from adult cells would bring perilous consequences may put a damper to the practical limits of any future cloning of farm animals.

To put it mildly, Mother Nature had thrown a monkey wrench into cloning exercises. Scientists had to overcome this momentary obstacle to make cloning a successful endeavor.

The modern theory of cellular ageing holds the view that at the tip of each chromosome there lays a region called telomere. The information that tells the chromosomes to divide is stored in telomere. At each successive cell division, which precedes chromosome replication, the telomere is shortened. Thus after X number of chromosome replication when all the telomere is reduced to zero, no chromosome replication can take place. Without chromosome (DNA) replication cell division is brought to a screeching halt. The cell then undergoes a complex process that the modern-day biologist termed 'apoptosis.' With 'apoptosis' comes the cellular death. So, it looks as if the tip of each chromosome holds key to the number of times a given chromosome will replicate or divide. When the tip is shortened, as was the case in Dolly, it is all but certain that molecular ageing would set in. It could very well be that Dolly the sheep may die in about five or six years. Quite a pernicious thought you might say. But such are the mysteries of life.

It is all but certain that future sheep breeder may only take cells from unborn embryo to circumvent the problem Dolly is facing now.

Other life scientists who are interested in studying cellular ageing may focus their attention to telomeric region of the chromosome. The phenomenon of decreasing the size of telomere at each chromosome division is popularly termed 'telomere frying.' In the next century, cell bi-

ologists, geneticists, protein biochemists, and other life scientists will race to figure out the underlying principles governing the shortening of telomere.

Once they understand the biochemical mechanism then efforts will be made to preserve the size of telomere. Because, cellular immortality could be achieved by not allowing the telomere to reduce in size. Protein biochemist will most certainly look for enzymes in the cells that degrades telomere.

Once that enzyme — the telomerase — is identified, scientists will tweak with it to inhibit its activity to achieve cellular immortality. As you can see, human race has a lot of stake in understanding cellular ageing. The cloned sheep, Dolly, may lead the scientists in unlocking the mystery of telomere.

In few years from now, Dolly may die of natural causes, but her legacy may live for a long time. Mind that human minds are curious to know the unknowns. Thus, as long as humanity will toy with the idea of achieving immortality, cloning research will continue unabated. The ewe Dolly had ushered us into a new domain of research from which there is no turning back.

The quest for immortality will push our life scientists to chart a course that may "collide" head-on with the established religions of the world. I even hate to predict the outcome of this "collision." It is comforting to know that this "collision" will not take place in our lifetime. Why then worry about it?

The author, a research scientist in the US, is involved in cloning genes in fungus and plants.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Deconstructing Milosevic's "Sacred Rights" to Kosovo

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

EVER since Slobodan Milosevic (a Serb from Montenegro) came to power in Serbia (one of the six constituent republics of former Yugoslavia) in 1989, so many intellectuals, historians, journalists and political strategists have written so much and so brilliantly on Kosovo, (which is variously described as a crisis, a problem, a tangle etc.) that I hesitated a long time to give my opinion on this subject. I am not a historian, nor an intellectual and definitely not an expert on geopolitical strategies. But I am going to examine the issue from an ordinary citizen's point of view, who has had considerable contact with the Slav people of different nationalities, including that of the United States and does not much understand leaders who take political decisions, affecting the lives of millions of human beings, in the closing years of the twentieth century, based on self-serving interpretation of medieval history and ancestral hatred.

My earliest recollection of the Slav people dates back to I think, 1961 or 1962, when a severe earthquake destroyed towns and villages in Yugoslavia (meaning land of the South Slavs). My English mentor, Frank Harcourt-Munnings together with several British charities organised relief operations to alleviate the immediate sufferings of the earthquake victims. In that connection, he visited the country several times and came in contact with a good number of local people there, particularly in Skopje (now capital of the independent republic of Macedonia). In one of his trips to Yugoslavia, he brought back to England a student called Boshko. He came from a small town in southern Macedonia (then part of Yugoslavia), very close to Pella [part of Greek Macedonia], where Alexander, the Macedonian conqueror was born in 356 B.C. Later we came to know other members of Boshko's family.

Since we belonged to more or less the same age group, Boshko and I became good friends. It is from him that I first came to know about the ethnic, cultural and religious complexities of Yugoslavia, which was composed of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and of course, Serbia), five languages (Serbo-Croat, Macedonian, Albanian, Slovenian and Hungarian) three religions

(Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Islam) and two alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin). He also told me that Yugoslavia was formed out of the remnants of two empires — the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian. Although he himself was of Macedonian Slav origin, I did not find any animosity in him against other ethnic groups. It is from him that I came to know that there were significant Muslim (close to 30% of the total population of Macedonia) minorities in his area and although they lived in separate neighbourhoods, there was considerable social contact among the different communities.

All this has unfortunately changed. The Federation of Yugoslavia no longer exists. The country has been violently torn asunder by wars. Why? If we have to look for one single individual who bears the responsibility for the destabilisation of the region, then I am afraid, we must point our finger to Milosevic. While Joseph Tito (whose father was Croat and mother Slovenian) had a decentralised government, held down ethnic antagonism by autocratic means (not that I support his method) and followed a policy of national unity among ethnic diversity, Milosevic destroyed national unity by trying to impose the superiority of the region, then I am afraid, we must point our finger to Milosevic. While Joseph Tito (whose father was Croat and mother Slovenian) had a decentralised government, held down ethnic antagonism by autocratic means (not that I support his method) and followed a policy of national unity among ethnic diversity, Milosevic destroyed national unity by trying to impose the superiority of the region, then I am afraid, we must point our finger to Milosevic.

Croatia, which had a significant Serb minority also declared its independence in June 1991. The country was invaded by the armies of Milosevic. The idea was to retain Croatia under the domination of the Serbs and if that failed then, to wrest control of Krajina, eastern Slavonia and Baranja, which had substantial Serb minorities, and make them parts of Milosevic's dreamland called Greater Serbia. The Croats, after some initial setbacks fought

back, defeated Milosevic, became independent and paid back Milosevic for the aggression by forcibly evicting more than two hundred thousand Serbs from their country, some of whom were sent to Kosovo by Milosevic for resettlement there. Macedonia also separated from the federation in 1991 and declared its independence. Milosevic launched a murderous campaign of ethnic cleansing (this time against the Serbo-Croat speaking Muslims and Croats) in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We all know what happened there (the mass killings in Srebrenica, the siege of Sarajevo, the deportation of two million civilians, the systematic raping of thousands of Muslim women, etc.) when the whole world looked on. (Where were the leftist demonstrators and pacifists then, who are protesting against NATO intervention today?) Milosevic's stooges committed the most heinous crimes against humanity. It was only the intervention of the United States, which stopped the killings. In any case, this is not the subject of this letter. The net result of Milosevic's grand design is that at present of the six constituent republics of Yugoslavia, there are only two left in the federation (Serbia and Montenegro) and I have serious doubts as to whether Montenegro will remain in the federation after the end of the war.

Let us go back to Kosovo and examine the validity of Milosevic's "sacred rights" to this territory. In the official propaganda coming out of Belgrade, the theory that is propagated (many Serbs unfortunately consider it as the Biblical truth) is that Kosovo is the cradle of Serb civilisation and that the Albanians are mere usurpers. Therefore, the Serbs have a divine right to that land and that authorities them to get rid of the two million or so Albanian-Kosovars, who for generations have been living there. No such theory has been expounded in Europe since the Holocaust of the Jews in Nazi Germany. This is true that the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, in which the Serbian army was defeated by the invading Ottoman Turks is a landmark in the history of Serb nationalism, because it led to the subsequent conquest of the whole of Serbia by the Turks. This is also true that in the

middle ages a sizeable displacement of the Serb population from Kosovo took place as a result of Ottoman imperial strategy. Three questions may be raised now. Can one adopt a policy of ethnic cleansing based on events that took place many centuries ago? How far back in history one should go to justify a current action? Is there an acceptable limit?

Actually at about the thirteenth century BC (long before the Slavs made their appearance on the Balkan scene), the Illyrians (of Indo-European origin), ancestors of modern Albanians occupied a sizeable expanse of territory, which not only included the whole of modern-day Albania but also Kosovo. In 168 BC, it became part of the Roman Empire. The Illyrians rendered distinguished services in the Roman legions. It is also interesting to note here some of the most important Roman emperors — Diocletian and Constantine the Great were of Illyrian origin. Although Hun and Visigothic incursions in the period between the third and the fifth centuries devastated the Roman empire, they did not make lasting alteration in the ethnic composition of the Illyrian-speaking territories of the empire. But the Slav invasions, which started in the sixth century, in approximately one hundred years, completely transformed the ethnic structure of the area. Croatia, Serbia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Montenegro and parts of Macedonia became Slav territories. Only the Albanians (including the Kosovars) remained as the direct descendants of the Illyrians. Towards the end of the twelfth century, Kosovo was conquered by the Serbians and annexed to Serbia. This gave rise to the Serbian theory of Kosovo being their "ancestral homeland", which completely ignored the fact that for more than a thousand years before the Serb conquest, the Albanians had been living there.

We have already seen how in the fifteenth century Kosovo and indeed the whole of Serbia became part of the Ottoman empire. As the power of the Ottomans started to decline in the early twentieth century, Serb nationalism grew in intensity with the objective of creating a strong Serb state, which ran against the interests of the regional super-power Austria who feared the rise of Serbia as an uncomfortable neighbour. At the end of the first Balkan War in 1912 between the Balkan League (Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Greece) and Turkey, the latter was easily defeated and Serbia occupied Albanian territories. This meant the break-up of the Ottoman empire in Europe. However, it was at the insistence of the Austrians that the Serbs had to withdraw from this territory and an independent Albania (which included Kosovo) was created in 1912. But as a result of the second Balkan War in 1913, Serbia acquired Kosovo and at the end of the first World War in 1918, the peacemakers confirmed the annexation of Kosovo by Serbia partly because of Serb participation in the war on the Allied side (Britain, France, Russia, the US etc.) and partly to satisfy the Serb claim to their "ancestral homeland" thus sowing the seeds of ethnic tensions for the future.

A new term "Turk" was invented. It did not mean ethnic Turks alone. Its wider connotation also included the Slav Muslims who spoke Serbo-Croatian and, of course, the Albanian-speaking Kosovars. A campaign was launched by the Serb authorities to expel as many "Turks" as possible and to redistribute their land among the Serb Colonisers. The world looked on in acquiescence. Due to popular uprisings by ethnic Albanians, Kosovo achieved autonomous status within Serbia in 1946. During the days of Tito (1945-1980), the Kosovars were allowed to manage their affairs, speak their language and were recognised as one of the eight political units (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Voivodina and Kosovo) with equal status in the Federal Government. Tito's death in 1980 changed all that. It was Milosevic who exploited the already-existing anti-Albanian feelings among the Serbs to capture power. In 1989, Milosevic abolished the autonomous status of the

province, put the entire region under military occupation, introduced an apartheid system, started a vigorous campaign of ethnic cleansing (with the objective of emptying Kosovo of all the inhabitants of Albanian origin) and revived the theory of Greater Serbia.

We are painfully aware of what has happened since 1989 and what is happening now. I was afraid that in Kosovo, Milosevic will be allowed to get away with it again. Luckily under coercion from the United States, the NATO has reacted and started a bombing campaign in Yugoslavia. If before the start of the bombing campaign, I watched the European reactions to the happenings in the Balkans with a sense of helplessness and dismay, now I am absolutely flabbergasted. Rarely have I been a witness to so much double talk and hypocrisy. In order not to bore the reader with too much detail, I shall deal with these topics briefly on a point by point basis.

According to many critics, the bombing is an illegal act because it has not been authorised by the United Nations. They seem to ignore that a bombing resolution would always meet with a Russian veto in the Security Council (until and unless the UN charter is amended). Does this mean to say that since no action can be taken without UN approval, world should stand by and watch how Milosevic continues with mass killings, violations and deportations? If that is so, does this not mean that the international community is indirectly supporting Milosevic's policy? "Oh, no," they reply, "what we should do is to negotiate with Milosevic." But the reality of the situation is that the western nations have negotiated long and hard without any success. Not many people like war. But if it is thrust on you, do you have any option but to fight back? Unfortunately, war is and has always been a part of the human condition. This, I am afraid, is the only language people like Milosevic understand. Actually, I would go so far as to say that if the West had reacted decisively against Milosevic in 1989, there would not be so much bloodletting and suffering in the Balkans as we are witnessing today. It could also have avoided the mass killings

and deportations in Croatia and Bosnia.

There have been leftist (I always thought that the left always fought for justice and human rights) demonstrations in European cities against the bombings because of civilian victims and destruction of the infra-structure in Yugoslavia. They also say that the bombings have merely provoked Milosevic to take further repressive measures against the Kosovars. I think everyone regrets civilian deaths and collateral damages. But since when has it been morally justifiable and politically correct not to take any action against a mass killer of hundreds of thousands of innocent victims (whose only "crime" was to have been born in a different ethnic group) because of collateral damages? To say the least, this is hypocrisy. With this rationale, no one should have done anything against Hitler.

There have also been a lot of criticism against the Americans (for some it is the empire of the evil and will remain so no matter what they do). They have been accused of having ulterior motives for taking action against Milosevic. The argument runs as follows: if the Americans did not do anything in Rwanda or Guatemala or Palestine to stop the killings and deportations there, why have they all of a sudden decided to intervene in Europe? "Well," some of them say, "the answer is very simple. They want to destroy the economic recovery of Europe and the Euro." None of them stops to think that this has not been a unilateral action. The US is only one of the nineteen western nations (most of them European) of this alliance who belatedly but finally decided to do something about the Milosevic problem. Some others say, "The Americans want to interfere in European affairs to maintain their global hegemony." These Europeans seem to forget that the Americans were invited twice before to "interfere" in the European conflicts which engulfed the whole world. Why were they welcome then and not now? Would Europe be what it is today without the vital and significant human and material sacrifices of the Americans in these two wars? Even if we admit that the reason behind US intervention is to maintain its

world leadership position, does it really matter to the Kosovars? If their European neighbours could not take the initiative, they are only too glad that someone from across the ocean has come to save their lives. Again, what sort of argument is this that since you did not or could not come to the aid of the victims in other parts of the world you have no right to help the Kosovars?

The NATO, in my opinion has committed, at least three errors. First of all, it seriously underestimated the level of Milosevic's insanity and resolve. Second, the allies should have maintained the threat of ground offensive from the very beginning. (This policy of not committing ground troops was, of course, adopted not to antagonise public opinion at home.) Third, given the fact that public opinion in Yugoslavia is completely controlled by Milosevic, the NATO should have installed powerful radio and television transmitters in Serbo-Croat language, close to the Serbian border with a view to winning the propaganda war inside Serbia. This is especially true if the NATO (for whatever reasons) is not prepared to fight a ground war in Kosovo.

There is no doubt that everyone wants an early end to the war, but not at any price. It should not be ended even in the manner the Bosnian war was ended. This time the NATO must ensure that a durable peace is achieved. We do not know if and when and under what conditions the hundreds of thousands of Kosovo refugees will be able to go back to their homes in Kosovo. But one thing is clear in my mind i.e. if Milosevic is not ousted from power and if a western democratic system is not established in Serbia, he will soon go against the people of Montenegro because of their somewhat neutral stand in this conflict, start another campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Hungarians of Voivodina and the Muslims of Sandzak. If he is allowed to get away with it, who knows what is going to happen in Macedonia, (whose role in this conflict, to put it mildly, has not been very clear), where almost thirty percent of the population is Muslim. While concluding this war, the NATO should also bear in mind that Tudjman (Croatia) is anxiously waiting for the outcome of the conflict to see whether the West gives him an opportunity to dismember Bosnia along ethnic lines.

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by Jim Davis

