

Spirit of Convocation Compromised

A university convocation is an academic festival, as it were, representing the finest hour for the graduating students, all faculty members and their pupils, each one being linked with the other in a loyalty chain to his or her alma mater. The occasion provides not merely a bonding experience but also a stimulus for reaching new heights of accomplishment in life. That is why it is important that, as far as practicable, students get a glimpse of it at close quarters. Unfortunately, this was not to be at the 40th general convocation of Dhaka University held on Saturday with a segment of students kept confined behind closed iron gates. We understand the authorities' point of view that if the students who had been opposing the conferment of doctorate degree on the PM were let in there could be disturbances at the convocation venue.

But what appears to have escaped the organisers' vision is that the confinement of the students was totally contrary to the spirit of the event, and was quite avoidable. The authorities could designate a certain area for them — if necessary by cordoning it off from the main area, like they do in the UK or USA — to stage their demonstrations from without affecting the convocation proceedings. University is, after all, a place for free thinking and spontaneous articulation of opposing views; this is where one likes to see a healthy inter-action of opinions leading to a cross fertilisation of ideas that is of the essence in high academic pursuits. This is also of critical importance to the nurture of a positive democratic culture and growth of a powerful civil society.

Where a convocation is held on the strength of a massive presence of security forces personnel numbering some 6000 it is the very spirit of convocation which gets hurt and shaken. Convocation being the embodiment of the best and the finest in terms of higher learning traditions, the stifling ambience was obviously anti-theatrical to its inner spirit.

It would have been certainly better, if in the knowledge of how divisive the country's politics has gotten today, Amartya Sen had been spared the spectacle. We could have held a separate convocation through which a unified national welcome could be extended to him in grateful acknowledgment of his having done us proud as a Bengali Nobel Laureate. Putting a political leader and an academic of outstanding international reputation on the same dais — the DU authorities should have known better in our typical political context — is dragging politics into the academics. Amartya Sen should have been honoured separately. He should have been spared the embarrassment of being honoured with the help of 6,000 security personnel, and faced with the boycott of a section of teachers and students. Definitely, Dr Sen deserved better.

Political Acumen Lacking

CITIZENS of the port city of Chittagong look saddled with the incumbent Mayor for another term in office. Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury is sure to be declared elected unopposed to the post of Mayor because of the last-minute withdrawal of three candidates who had earlier filed their nomination papers for the race.

This unique opportunity has been served on a platter to Mohiuddin by the policy makers of the combined opposition who are boycotting all elections under the present government as part of their strategy to go ahead with their one-point programme seeking resignat on of the government before time.

It is very interesting to note that this aspect of a walk-over to the opponent did never occur in the minds of the opposition strategists and they are now caught in their own trap. This is a tactical victory for the ruling party that they have taken the wind off the sails of opposition agitation. BNP and its allies have missed the bus for launching a fullscale agitation against the CCC elections as no contest for the top slot is on the cards. They should have had at least someone as a candidate opposing the sitting Mayor so as to be able to continue with the agitational programme of theirs. Instead, they are now faced with a prospect of watching the victory procession of Mohiuddin Chowdhury from the side-walks and bite their own hands.

The opposition must learn from this ruling party game and plan their future strategy accordingly if they really want to be reckoned with in such matters. BNP and its allies need to be very watchful against such foolhardy decision in the future.

We Condemn

SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga campaigning for a second term of office narrowly escaped an attempt on her life by a suspected LTTE suicide bomber in the heart of Colombo two days back. Till the time of writing this comment, at least 33 persons were feared killed and 137 others admitted to the government hospital with injuries. Another meeting being addressed by the opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe was hit by a bomb blast killing former army chief of staff Alagana.

We sadly recall the names of other leading political personalities said to have been killed by LTTE bombers — former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, Sri Lankan President, R. Premadasa and the Presidential candidate in the 1994 polls, Gamini Disanayake. Earlier this year, Razeek, a para-military leader who was fighting against the LTTE, and a senior leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, were killed. While we are relieved by Kumaratunga's miraculous escape, we condemn the new spate of terrorism and urge all concerned to shun the path of violence for the good of the entire Sri Lankan people.

Kumaratunga has come a long way towards making peace with the help of Opposition Leader Wickremesinghe. A negotiated settlement is the only way out of the ethnic conflict between the LTTE and the Sinhalese. Violence and use of force have not helped bring about any solution to the Sri Lankan problem; it is, therefore, time that the warring parties decided to give peace a chance.

Chasing Osama : A Dangerous Obsession

The UN resolution against the Taliban represents a dangerous trend. The resolution appears to treat terrorism as a problem to be tackled multilaterally. The only problem is that the US unilateralism has been successfully multilateralised with the UNSC acting as a rubber stamp.

groups were already in Pakistan city of Peshawar. There were speculations that with the US aircraft carriers in support from the Persian Gulf they would storm Laden's hideout and grab him.

Amidst these conjectures the US State Department throughout the year also kept up a conduit of dialogue with the Taliban with the fond hope of eventually extradicting Bin Laden whose exact location was known only to few Taliban leaders. But a flurry of diplomacy as well as a record \$5 million reward has so far failed to get any clue of Osama — let alone the question of his possible extradition. Under the circumstances, an exasperated US administration has chosen to freeze Taliban finances and property assets in the US and banned the US trade with Taliban militia to bring them to their heels. The Taliban however have not yielded to the US pressure and persistently refused to abandon their valuable guest.

Now on 15 October in an extraordinary step the UN Security Council — obviously under the US pressure and persuasion — passed an exceptional resolution imposing sanction on Taliban in Afghanistan if they do not hand over Osama bin Laden to the US to stand trial, inter alia, the August 1998 bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. This is only the second time that the Security Council has sought the arrest of the individuals whom the US considers fugitive. The

first was when the punitive measures were imposed on Libya in 1992 following Libya's refusal to extradite two of its citizens in connection with 1986 blowing up of a US airliner over Lockerbie in Scotland. Under the terms of the UNSC resolution number 1267 which was passed unanimously by all 15 members, the Taliban were given time up till mid-November to hand over Osama. If not, the air traffic between Afghanistan and outside world would be banned and any fund the Taliban government had

measure of degree to which all major powers feel threatened by the spectre of terrorism which in its intensity can compel the rivals like the US and China to close their ranks while differing on other international issues. Nevertheless, the latest UN resolution, in spite of its unanimity, is deeply flawed and fraught with dangers of unpredictable proportion.

Under international law one country that wants to arrest an individual residing in another must follow the procedure prescribed by bilateral agreement.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

deposited with foreign banks would be frozen. There was no option clause in the resolution. That means every country including three countries that recognised Taliban Afghanistan — Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE — also would be obliged to uphold the resolution. Some of the sanctions were already imposed on Afghanistan in July last. And if the Libyan experience is any guide the sanctions will be stiffened in Afghanistan in due course.

That the US was able to obtain the concurrence of China and Russia — which usually abstain on sanction resolutions — had been significant. It shows a

If there is no such agreement or the country granting refuge refuses to extradite the wanted individual the matter must end there. But the US is in no mood to let it end there. That she wants to pursue it to any extent was clear from her obsession right from the beginning. In known history no single individual was ever subjected to so much lethality with so great arrogance as those of 80 Tomahawks fired on Osama's suspected sanctuary. The head of the few were priced so high! None was ever dealt with as an individual by the world body.

And all these have been done against a man whose image remains untarnished even after

years of Western propaganda to project him as an outlaw. The more the West tries to demonise him, the more a hero he becomes. In the teeming cities of Islamic world and among the hundreds of thousands young men disaffected equally by arrogant and unjust notions of the West and their own weak corrupt government he is a hero to whom they tend to turn for deliverance. His real strength lies in his extraordinary piety and tremendous courage of conviction. It will be far from easy to confront Osama bin Laden because that will mean a dangerous confrontation with all who have thrown in their lot with Osama's global mission of Islamic revivalism.

It may be mentioned that Spain has been seeking the extradition of Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet from Britain for trial for his crimes against 'humanity'. If the British court or the British Home Secretary decides not to extradite Pinochet the UNSC will be hardly likely to impose sanction on Britain. And surely the crimes, if any, committed by Bin Laden would be just a patch compared to those attributed to Pinochet during his 16 years rule yet Bin Laden showed moral courage to the responsibility of at least one of his actions — bombing the US military base at Dhahran in 1996.

In retrospect, soon after its embassies were bombed in East Africa the US fired a barrage of missiles at targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. In

Khartoum the country's only pharmaceutical factory was destroyed and several people were killed and injured. The US said that the factory was owned by Bin Laden and was manufacturing chemical weapons. Today both these claims are proving inaccurate and the factory's actual owner has filed a suit in a Washington court demanding compensation. If the suit is successful the Sudanese government will be well within its right to indict the US president for ordering the missile attack. It would be interesting to see how the UNSC reacts to draft resolution threatening sanctions unless Mr Bill Clinton is turned over to a Sharia court in Khartoum!

Moreover, even if a Libyan experience is a guide to gauge the extent of the power the world's sole superpower can wield to bring the defaulting government to its knees in handing over its citizens to an external authority — Afghanistan is hardly an analogy. It is true that Libya after her years of refusal has finally been compelled to comply but Afghanistan which is not as yet a recognised entity of international system, can easily flout any authority. It is already a nuisance to the system, it can prove to be still bigger a nuisance to the international community.

Terrorism must be fought but there can be no justification for double standards and violation of international law. The UN resolution against the Taliban represents a dangerous trend. The resolution appears to treat terrorism as a problem to be tackled multilaterally. The only problem is that the US unilateralism has been successfully multilateralised with the UNSC acting as a rubber stamp.

Corporate Pakistan

Increasing revenues, decreasing expenditures is the end game for the economic emancipation of the masses. There is still a long, long way to go but the portents are good and that is a plus point for the evolution of Corporate Pakistan.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

houses in the textile industry, an entrepreneur with credibility who has enlarged his business empire within Pakistan. He provides employment and employment opportunities, that means bread on the table for thousands of families. NAB's draconian measures have caused apprehension and misgivings among the real-estate business community that needs to be addressed lest the innocent suffer more than the guilty, it being commonplace that the guilty normally do not leave any fingerprints at the scene of the crime. Naseem Saigol's predicament is acting as a disincentive to genuine businessmen who want to get on with their lives as entrepreneurs.

According to reports in the financial institutions he was well on the way to loan repayments, maybe it is the Union Bank sale that is under question-mark. Whatever it is, it needs to be clarified because Naseem Saigol's case is like an uncertain beacon for entrepreneurs throughout Pakistan, both existing and budding. Either NAB has a cast-iron case against him or they should ease off. In any case punishment should follow judgement, not the other way around.

If he is judged by public perception to have been victimised wrongly then the country will be in more trouble than money drain, brain-drain combined. The CE needs to read 'Atlas Shrugged' by Ayn Rand, a fictionalised account of what happens when there is a drain of entrepreneur skills in the face of victimisation. That drain of entrepreneur skills is happening already and if it gathers momentum it will be catastrophic for this country, no one will ever be able to put Corporate Pakistan together again. Far more simpler would have been to put bankruptcy and

foreclosure laws on the anvil, at least for loan default banks would have done the needful rather than NAB.

No doubt this military rule is straight from the heart, it is different. Press freedom has not been curbed, a very smart move, neither are jackboots and APCs in evidence on street corners anywhere. There have been no hasty decisions and as the CE had promised, any mistakes that may have been inadvertently made have been corrected sooner rather than later. Even though the process has been deliberately thought out to instill confidence among the masses, the honeymoon won't last. The public hunger for blood has to be balanced against the need to keep Corporate Pakistan going, ironically for the sake of the public. The CE and his staff

may find themselves to be in a fine juggling act that will include matching domestic considerations against world opinion about justice and fair play, made more sensitive in an enhanced human rights world environment. The CE will not go wrong if he remembers that like himself the nation is synonymous with the Army in being middle class and generally having middle class values. The hopes and aspirations of 'the great silent majority' of this country has only middle-class objectives. It is only when the rulers fall prey to elitist values then the trouble starts as it requires money (and lots of it) to be part of the elite, unfortunately temptations are strewn for the taking everywhere.

The ERP catered for the workers by giving a relief package of sorts to them, a modest beginning maybe but a step nevertheless in the right direction. Rs. 100 may be a pittance compared to the rise in fuel prices that is going to cause inflation but still the money is of symbolic if not material value. Corporate Pakistan cannot foreclose its social obligations to

the poor, after all poverty alleviation is the centrepiece of economic amelioration of the masses. Burdening the masses to feed the exchequer is basically a bureaucratic idea, here it can be condoned because of inordinate rise in world oil prices. The announcement of the ERP confirmed that the CE's choice of Shaikat Aziz as Economic Czar was nothing short of brilliant as the mature and deliberate unfolding of the economic agenda has shown.

The Finance Minister, rose from humble beginnings in Citibank to great heights on the strength of performance and personality. Shaikat Aziz has the reputation of being a team player par excellence as is apparent from the results so far, modest perhaps but positive and in the right direction. For now the Finance Minister's main task will be to balance a budget, to make those liable for taxes to pay taxes, to curtail those tasked to collect these taxes from putting a major portion in their pockets, increasing revenues, decreasing expenditures is the end game for the economic emancipation of the masses. There is still a long, long way to go but the portents are good and that is a plus point for the evolution of Corporate Pakistan.

OPINION

For a Stable Political System

Ramzul Seraj

give their children some basic primary education, health care and security of their own life and property of their own. Can the leaders of all the political parties take sometime to look into their inner self and check if this is their thought process?

I believe that the vision of a leader of the country, once in opposition, more or less reflects that of the general masses. But unfortunately these vision changes as soon as they become ruler of the country. So what is their vision?

1. To allocate plots of land in prime areas for themselves and their relatives?

2. To facilities for their associates/supporters to get business?

3. Claim to the country to become the most developed country by 2010/2020 and therefore take all steps to be in power up to that time?

Our leaders have to learn to lower their vision and ambition and tune themselves to the common aspiration of the majority people. Sufferings from unbearable poverty, the desire to earn their daily wages so that they can feed themselves and their family, a roof over their head to protect from rain, cold or heat, and simple education is all that they want. Our problems are immense. Overpopulation, malnutrition, destitute, increase of landless peasant are due to erosion of land by river or just selling to survive, illiteracy, law and security, are all very real issues which the country head has to address.

Under such circumstances it is difficult to understand why anyone in his right mind would try to take the mantle of leadership over one's shoulder and solve all these problems. But thanks to Allah, we have brave politicians, leaders and visionaries who are willing to take this challenge.

I put forward some 'dos':

1. All parties including local election should be held once in 4 years under a neutral caretaker government.

2. No leader should hold the office of Prime Minister for more than two terms. A party can be victorious for more than two terms but their parliamentary party must elect a new leader for the third term.

3. A Prime Minister holding office for his/her first term

should inherit a President who is already serving a fresh term elected by the previous parliament.

A President who would also be limited to a maximum of 2 terms of 4 years should be elected by the parliament by a simple majority.

A President candidate must secure a minimum 50 per cent of the parliament votes. Should there be more than two candidates and a candidate fails to secure 50 per cent vote in the first round, then there should be a second ballot only between the 1st and 2nd candidate. This vote may be across party lines.

5. All members of the Parliament should be elected directly. The present system of nominating women MP should be abolished. Our government leader is a woman. So, is the opposition leader. Many women have directly won seats. Therefore, there is no reason for reserved seats. The present system of a party who may only have 151 members out of total 300 elected MPs to nominate 30 women members from their own party and thus give them an absolute majority frustrates the electorate's wishes of having a parliament which is active.

6. The President should have the power to select the Chief of the Armed forces. The Ministry of Defence may choose three names for each of the services from which the President will choose the final.

7. The President should be the Chancellor of Universities and All Vice Chancellor should be selected from one of three candidates nominated by Senate. The idea for this is to free the campus from the influence of ruling party student power.

The judiciary must be separated from the executive at all levels.

8. Radio and Television should be under a regulatory body where country's leading intellectual/artist are to be members. They can nominate the DG of radio and TV.

Can we not all unite for the greater interest of this country and people? Can we not put the picture of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and General Zia in all government offices?

The author is industrialist and executive committee member of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

To the Editor...

And today, it's 'freedom'

Sir, Mr. Rehman Sobhan, in his article 'Failed Governance in South Asia' (December 13th) states that 'most of the military regimes of the 60s and 70s had been backed by the Western powers and sustained by their aid, in the belief that they could be used as assets in the Cold War.'

He then goes on to describe the shift in Western foreign policy as 'restoration of faith in democracy amongst the Western powers.'

I doubt if western foreign policy is dictated on a global scale by anything as vague, soft and noble as 'faith' - in anything. The imposition of democracy after the Berlin Wall came down is merely another justification for the use of power. The West has always needed to justify its use of power - with the Portuguese it was Christianity, with the British it was commerce and civilisation. Today, it's 'freedom'. And if the West had suddenly developed a passion for democracy, it would have embraced the Middle East monarchies with romantic intensity!

Therefore, when western countries tolerate a military takeover, we can be rest assured that a cynical power-calculation is at play. Mr. Rehman Sobhan observes 'The coup in

Pakistan is of significance in any diagnosis of the process of governance in South Asia or indeed most developing countries.' This is a surprising statement. The coup in Pakistan is only the third in a series of military engagements countenanced by the West - the first being that in Algeria and the second in Turkey in the last decade. In Algeria and Turkey, military intervention was encouraged to keep the Islamists out of power. A few weeks before the coup in Pakistan, The Economist of London observed that the only circumstance under which the USA would tolerate a military takeover was if the mullahs were on the ascendant. (The Indian secret service claims that the coup had been planned months ahead.) Clearly in Pakistan the fundamentalists were the only group gaining from the failure in governance. Therefore, it was not the failure of a government which prompted the coup, but the failure to stem the fundamentalists.

The only fundamentalists the US is willing to support are its allies against other fundamentalists. The Taliban are supported because the US hopes they would bring stability to Afghanistan so as to enable an oil pipeline to be built through the country, thereby bypassing Iran, and simultaneously providing the Shia country with a Sunni enemy to the east. A mul-

lah-led uprising in Pakistan itself - sponsor-country to the Taliban - was a different story altogether.

The anti-fundamentalist nature of the coup and of the present government is equally obvious from the number of NGO people who have actively supported the government. When 'civil society' itself backs a military regime, we can be quite certain that a cause greater than democracy is being served - as it was during the cold war. Only, the spectre of communism has given way to the spectre of Islam.

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"The third millennium?"

Sir, I share the same view about the third millennium as Mr QMS Hafiz of New DOHS, Dhaka which he expressed in his letter on December 2 '99. We are entering the last year of the second millennium. The change of digits does not mean that a new century has begun. It is very puzzling that the whole world is brimming with excitement. Is there any other explanation? I would appreciate a clarification.

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