

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 acknowledgement 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 resignation 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 full-scale 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 Alagama.

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, Gamin Dissanayake. Earlier this year, Razek, 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.

LAST year when an embattled President Bill Clinton enraged at simultaneous bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam ordered cruise missile attacks against Sudan and Afghanistan it took quite sometimes to know of the precise targets. As regards objective in Afghanistan the needle of suspicion however pointed to Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire holed up in that country as a fugitive. In 1996 he claimed the credit for bombing military base in Dhahran killing 18 US soldiers. Ever since he had been on the run and currently on CIA's most wanted list. He was a precision target but the US chose to fire a devastating barrage with the hope that he would come in its sweep. Osama, however, escaped unhurt but since then his whereabouts are shrouded in mystery although evidences abound that he is still in Taliban controlled Afghanistan under the protection of a special commission. However an intense hunt continued.

In the meantime a federal indictment in New York in November last year charged him with the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In a video interview recently telecast from Qatar television network Bin Laden denied his involvement in embassy bombing but exhorted his followers to strike at US interests anywhere. An infuriated US authority declared a reward of \$5 million for his capture. In the resultant faceoff another US-Bin Laden confrontation loomed. In a highly charged atmosphere there were rumours that the US on its part might attempt a preemptive attack on Laden's sanctuary. There were reports that the US commando

groups were already in Pakistani 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 extraditing 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

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 pre-

scribed by bilateral agreement.

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.

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 knee in handing over its citizens to an external authority — Afghanistan is hardly an analogy. It is true that Libya after 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.

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 recognise Taliban — 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

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

among the taxmen. The General Sales Tax (GST) still needs to be sold to the broad mass of businessmen who hate documentation. That it will be passed on as inflation to consumers is very much a possibility. The CE's emphasis on increasing our agriculture yield by substantive measures and for enhanced activity in oil and gas exploration was also very positive.

The voluntary cut in Defecre expenditures by about Rs. 7 billion without compromising on security is a welcome and symbolic act by the CE if only because the masses have been asked to make sacrifices across the board. Trimming will take one only part of the way in reducing deficits, what is required is wholesale surgery. From belt-tightening we come to "money whitening" with the tax amnesty till Mar 31, 2000. The availability of FEBCs to do the same without being called into account ensured that earlier "money whitening" schemes failed. The carrot alongside the military baton just might work this time, one will wait and see.

Some successes were already under the belt of the Finance Minister, at least US\$ 2 billion plus in credit has been re-scheduled, there is progress in settling issues with the IPFs. Liberty Power was a landmark among the nine that have already reduced their tariffs, the shadows of Ebrahim Elawar and Brian Cheng notwithstanding. While shadow-boxing with Hubco is continuing, Shaukat has plenty of Saudi clout with Alireza and Co to pull it off in the next few weeks.

The CE apologised twice on behalf of the nation, once for the gender gap is welcome, we must bring females positively into the economic cycle for mass economic emancipation. The idea of having a separate corporate entity to deal with sick industries is essentially sound. The proposals with respect to taxation were also sound, including taxing of agriculture income, however we missed this opportunity of simplifying the whole individual and corporate taxation process on a drastic manner that could have excluded endemic corruption

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-time 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, fictionalised account of what happens when there is a drain of entrepreneur skills in the fact of victimisation. That drain of entrepreneur skills is happening already and if it gathers momentum it would 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 becoming 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.

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 pitance 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

OPINION

For a Stable Political System

Ramzul Seraj

After an epic 9-month freedom struggle, the sacrifice of about 30 lac people, sufferings of about 10 million displaced, and the humiliating experience of 65 million people who were virtual prisoners in their own land and terrorised by the occupying Pakistan army, Bangladesh emerged a free country on December 16, 1971.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib

Rahman who initiated the six-point demand realised that the ruling establishment would never relinquish their control of East Pakistan. Even after the landmark election victory in 1970, it became clear that the vested ruling clique of West Pakistan would never allow the people of East Pakistan, the majority, to rule. Bangabandhu then dreamt of a Sonar Bangla where the people would be free to create their own destiny. The entire nation slowly began to rally for the cause of a separate motherland.

The army crack down of

March, 1971 glorified the entire nation. Bengali armed forces personnel, EPR, police, political leaders, civil servants, businessmen, students, peasants — all were in favour of creating a homeland — Bangladesh.

Major Zia seized the opportunity of making a historic radio broadcast from Kalurghat in Chittagong. He called upon the people, in the name of Bangabandhu, to unite and resist the armed aggression. He particularly urged upon the Bengali soldiers, EPR, police and Ansars to get together with the people and start the resistance. The nation had a goal and a vision in front of them; a desire to achieve a nationhood. The Mukti Bahini was formed uniting the people with the armed forces and other law enforcement forces. In December 1990, after a long rule of nine years by General Ershad, a period considered autocratic, election took place and a new government came into power.

Abraham Lincoln once said:

"Government should be of the people, by the people, for the people."

Is this happening here?

Majority are poor, our per capita national income is still less than \$300. People want stable commodity prices so that they can at least feed themselves twice a day, a simple homestead a tinned roof or a straw hut dwelling ability to

to

lower their vision and ambition and tune themselves to the common aspiration of the majority people. Sufferings from unbearable poverty, they 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 elections 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.

4. 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 MP's to nominate 30 women members from their own party and thus give them an absolute majority frustrates the electorates' 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 regular body where country's leading intellectual/artist are to be members. They can nominate the DG of radio and TV.

Can we not unite for the greater interest of our country and people? Can we not put the picture of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib in all government offices?

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