

Democratic Governance in an Intolerant Society

EVER since its independence the people of Bangladesh could enjoy the rule of democratic government for less than 14 years (1972-75 and 1991-2000). They were under dictatorial rule for 14 years (1975-81 and 1982-90). During Pakistani days democratic rule existed for only 11 years (1947-58) and military rule for 13 years (1958-71). Thus after the end of the British Raj in 1947 we could enjoy democratic rule for only 25 years with interruptions. Thus if our people fail to show enough respect for democratic practices we cannot blame them because learning to show respect to democracy depends on a number of factors and period of 25 years cannot be considered as enough time for learning. We cannot ignore the truth that the sophistication of western democracy is not understood by our illiterate poor people. They want rule by good people, people who are honest, people who can deliver good to them.

Establishing democracy in a poor developing country is a stupendous task. However, India could hold to democratic rule for 53 years. Neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh could save themselves from the curse of military rule. For India it has been possible because Indian society is more tolerant as compared to both Pakistan and India. Military rule suits certain classes of people. One of such classes is the bureaucrats. As military rulers are not dependent on the people they depend heavily on the close advisers of the bureaucrats. In such regimes role of public servants is changed to that of masters. But in the process they can neither become good servants nor good masters. Under the military we see a new kind of 'public servants'. They are cabinet ministers or advisers of the dictator. These apparent 'sycophants' are no better than purely temporary government servants working on 'no work no pay' basis. They behave as jesters and are responsible to their masters (the military rulers).

For the sheer survival of democracy let the major political parties refrain from the path of confrontation. If cooperation is not at all possible why not develop the spirit of peaceful coexistence? Prevalence of peaceful atmosphere may enable the common people to exercise their voting right without hindrance to enable them to make correct judgement and elect right kind of people.

by ABMS Zahur

allowed to be estimated. In regard to their corruption a survey of houses built by government servants in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Dhanmondi and expenses on their children's education can provide a fairly good idea. Due to repeated shocks on democratic institutions from military regimes the people of Bangladesh could not get enough opportunity to learn democratic practices such as tolerance. The brightest and the most attractive feature in democracy is respect for others' opinions. In the animal world the strongest dictates. If similar practice prevails in our society how can we claim our superiority over other animals. It is a common knowledge that most people in Bangladesh do not practice democracy in their own homes or private life. If we cannot start to show respect to demo-

cratic practices in our own private lives how can we expect to build up national democratic institutions or to strengthen the existing ones. The saying that people who are bright and rich always listen and that is how they got the money and that is how they keep it holds good for the people of Bangladesh. As we do not listen we are poor and we fail to retain wealth. We do not respect others' opinion. We may ignore what happened in the dictatorial regimes of Zia or Ershad because in military parlance people are regarded as 'subjects'. But in the democratic regime of Khaleda Zia we heard that even the student front of BNP is good enough to take care of the movement of the opposition parties. This sounds certainly like bragadoocio of a dictator not a compromising statement of a democratic leader. Right from the

start of Awami League regime BNP made it abundantly clear that they could not accept the result of the election with good grace. The tantrums of some of the leaders of the opposition were certainly undemocratic. Of course BNP has good reason to be angry. The non-cooperation of the then opposition parties ultimately cost them their power. Though the last national election was held under a neutral caretaker government BNP did not hesitate to accuse AL of rigging the contest. Earlier the AL chief also blamed the opponents of subtle rigging. If in the next election under the caretaker government the opposition alliance is defeated we may get similar reaction from them.

Attendance of a large number of people in the public meeting does not necessarily mean the support of the people. Majority of the people attend political meetings because of their curiosity to listen what the leading politicians say. Casting of their votes depends mainly on two factors: campaigning and mass media. Campaigning is regarded as more than half of the battle of winning an election. It creates a favourable public image of the party. It is a political acculturation process designed to motivate the voting public towards a particular direction as the polling day draws on apace. The mass media are the 'instruments of socialization, they are efficient and their sweep is vast enough to cover the huge population ...' [Lucien W. Pye, Communications and Political Development (Princeton University Press, 1963)]. However, in a developing country like Bangladesh the media mainly concentrate on urban centres during the

campaign time. In the developing countries 'the signs of media all but vanish at the borders of the cities' [W. Schramm, Mass Media and National Development (Stanford University Press, California, 1965)]. Thus we may not attach much importance on the role of media in Bangladesh where less than 20 per cent people live in cities. There is a strong rumour that the opposition alliance will press for changing the whole set of election commission as they consider the present election commission as biased. Even if the caretaker government agrees to such a proposal it will be virtually an impossible task and a serious political disturbance may ensue. In such a situation there may not be any election. The apprehension of the opposition alliance does not appear to be well founded because, (a) election will be held under a neutral government, (b) the administration will not be under any pressure from any side, (c) the foreign observers from some important donor countries will be coming to Bangladesh about 6 to 8 weeks ahead of election, and (d) the armed forces will be deployed near the election booths. Even in our existing situation even a fair and free election can

hardly guarantee smooth running of a parliamentary democratic government. It all depends on the decision of our major political parties. They must learn to respect each other's views. They must believe in serving the people they represent. They must come out of their parochial party or self-interest. Without developing the spirit of tolerance, sense of mutual respect and dignity democracy can never flourish. If the major parties continue harming each other the foundation of democracy will become weak and some ominous force may strike the severe blow on a weak foundation some day. For the sheer survival of democracy let the major political parties refrain from the path of confrontation. If cooperation is not at all possible why not develop the spirit of peaceful coexistence? Prevalence of peaceful atmosphere may enable the common people to exercise their voting right without hindrance to enable them to make correct judgement and elect right kind of people. Without right kind of people the existing weak base of democracy cannot be strengthened. And by right kind we mean those with honesty, sincerity and fairly high sense of patriotism and, above all, who are tolerant of others' opinions.

Tale of a Professorial Fellowship at a Prestigious University

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

IT is said education makes a man/woman perfect and education in a good learning institute helps develop one's mental faculty. In this respect Ruprecht-Karls University in Heidelberg, which is popularly known as Heidelberg University in the Federal Republic of Germany, offers best possible education. I have had the opportunity of visiting this university, one of the oldest in Europe, several times during my tour of duty as a Bangladeshi diplomat in Bonn, Charles University in Prague, which is possibly the oldest, which was founded several years before Vienna University, Vienna University was established in 1365.

Having been inspired by the setting up of the two universities within the vicinity of German territory, Ruprecht I of Palatinat state planned to establish similar university to demonstrate to his people that he was a wise and circumspect ruler, who was fully aware of the necessity of expanding education while protecting the interest of the church. On 18 October 1386 Ruprecht I established Heidelberg University in line with Sorbonne University of Paris. More importantly this alma mater would require to produce professors who could serve Ruprecht as his legal experts, ambassadors and advisors. Over and above, this university could be expected to produce physicians, clergy, officials and teachers to ensure stewardship management and administration in his territory of Palatinat.

The great schism and the division of Christianity into two embittered camps rather created favourable condition for the realisation of the plan. Religious strife in France drove German professors and students at the Sorbonne in Paris to take shelter in Heidelberg University. Heidelberg is situated on Neckar river and dotted with old castle ruins and age-old student pubs and became known all over the world for its manufacture of printing presses. Heidelberg University had four faculties at the initial stage, one each for theology, law, medicine and philosophy for the arts. With a small band of teachers this university began its journey in the fourteenth century. Now it has grown in its depth and dimension. Today's Heidelberg University has 437 professors, 3,430 non-professional teaching and research staff and about 30,000 students. The number of faculties stood at 15 at present.

Heidelberg's magnificent book treasures and the aftermath of the World War II when some 40,000 volumes were lost, contains 2.8 million volumes, 390,000 further titles, approximately 7000 manuscripts, 1704 incunabula, 4,500 documents, 5,785 newspapers and journals. The South Asia Institute which was founded in 1962 is the success story of this university. India's then president Radhakrishnan who was a renowned scholar had suggested the name of the institute. It is designed to do research and impart teaching on the countries of the region, disseminate research results, function as a source of public information and provide advancement of knowledge for the coming generation of scholars. The South Asia Institute has eight departments which include development economics, ethnology, geography, history, classical indology, modern indology (modern languages and literatures of South Asia), international economic and development policy and political science. In the modern indology department Bengali is taught but there is only one Bengali teacher in this department, who hails from West Bengal of India. This particular institute has been maintaining close link with research centres in Europe, Asia and America. It also conducts a number of research projects in this region in cooperation with local scholars. The government of India provides grants to the scholars to teach and study on the region. Baden-Wurttemberg state of Germany in which Heidelberg is situated also provides grants to Indian scholars to come to Heidelberg University as visiting professors. The government of Pakistan established an Allama Iqbal professorial fellowship, which provides an opportunity to scholars from Pakistan for participation in teaching and research programmes. In order to coordinate with scholars closely the institute has been maintaining offices in New Delhi since 1962 and Kathmandu since 1985. Allama Iqbal Professorial fellowship actually inspired me to find out avenues for the establishment of a professorial chair in the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Mr Anil Das Gupta, who resides in Muhtal near Frankfurt and is a member of the Central Committee of Awami League, encouraged me to do something in Germany in the name of Bangabandhu. Con-

vinced by the fact that professorial chair and a road named after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would have been a befitting tribute to the Germans, I broached these matters with Mr Sujit Chowdhury, former chairman and present project manager, African-Asian student promotion unit of Gottingen University of Germany. On his suggestion I immediate reaction was that we could utilise the services of Dr Giasuddin Molla, teacher from Dhaka University, who would join Heidelberg University as a research fellow, for the purpose of the seminar or we would have to bring scholars from Dhaka at our cost. On his suggestion a meeting was arranged by me with the Director of the Institute for Ban-

money because salary, accommodation and other allowances should be provided for the professor by the sending state while the South Asia Institute would provide the fellows with a workplace equipped with telephone and computer, and guarantee access to the library as well as use of any other facilities available, especially telefax and copying machines. I got the impression that the institute has no objection for establishing a professorial chair provided the government of Bangladesh supported the project financially. Accordingly, I requested the Ambassador to write to the government for according sanction for placing a Professor in the Institute who will occupy the chair. In the meantime I suggested the names of Dr Abdullah Al Muti Sharifuddin and Professor Dr Anisuzzaman for participation in the proposed symposium on

Bangabandhu, but the Ambassador thought that the Ministry concerned should select the eminent personalities for participation in such a symposium. As a result, the process was bogged down because of the bureaucratic red-tapism. At last one vice-chancellor Professor Kayesuddin and a pro-vice-chancellor Prof Abdul Bayes of Jahangirnagar University were finally selected one week ahead of the scheduled date of the symposium. I had to seek apology several times from Dr Subrata for this unwarranted delay. It was really an embarrassing situation. The symposium was organised on 17 December also to commemorate the victory day. Both the vice-chancellor and pro-vice-chancellor stayed at my official residence. On the scheduled day the symposium was held at Heidelberg University and the discussion that followed after the presentation of two key-note papers was really lively. Research fellows from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India took part. In fact this seminar on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Emergence of Bangladesh has hastened the process of establishing Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Professorial Fellowship at the South-Asia Institute of Heidelberg University, which will promote scholarly exchanges between the South-Asia Institute and Academic institutions in Bangladesh, reinforce the quality of teaching and research in South Asian studies in general and Bangladesh in particular, and promote the two-way mobility of scholars through conferences

and net-working. A memorandum of understanding was signed on 05 August 1999. It is a great achievement because such professorial fellowship was established for the first time outside Bangladesh and that too in a very prestigious university of the world. It would have been impossible to establish professorial fellowship in the name of Bangabandhu had Dr Subrata K Mitra not been forthcoming in extending his cooperation. It may be noted that this professorial fellowship will be chaired by scholars from all the disciplines represented at the Institute according to MOU. The main criterion for the selection of scholar should be 'academics of the highest order'. It is very painful to hear from teachers of Dhaka University that the selection of a young teacher from the Department of Political Science has not been done in letter and spirit of the MOU. One expects the incumbent, who occupies Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Professorial Fellowship in South Asia Institute of the Heidelberg University, should match with the standard of education and high quality of research it conducts. Heidelberg University has attained a name in the world by dint of its meritorious services to the development of professionalism in education, which is aptly reflected from the Nobel prizes and other international awards own by its teaching staff. As many as 13 teachers from this alma mater earned Nobel prizes over the last two centuries.



Signing of the MOU: The writer is seen at the extreme right.

had discussion with Dr Subrata K Mitra, Head of the Political Science Department of the Institute for holding a seminar on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with a view to introducing this legendary personality to the faculty members before proposing establishment of a chair in his name. He accepted the idea as he was aware of the episode which led to the war of liberation. At the time he was in Delhi University. Dr Subrata, however, suggested the title of the seminar: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Emergence of Bangladesh. As he was about to leave for London he requested me to discuss this matter further with Director of South Asia Institute Professor Hans Georg Bohle who is a geographer. He further said that he would brief the Director before his departure and requested me to provide him with as much materials as possible on Bangabandhu which I did. His

gladness Ambassador on 15 July 1998. Dr Subrata informed me that his Research Assistant Mr Peter Lehr will remain present on his behalf. In the meeting Director, SAI agreed in principle to hold the symposium on Bangabandhu. In this meeting I had discussion with Mr Peter Lehr and Dr Wolfgang Peter Zingel, Professor of Economics about Allama Iqbal professorial chair and wanted to know how much expenditure was involved for the establishment of such a chair. They informed me that it would cost substantial amount of

machines. I got the impression that the institute has no objection for establishing a professorial chair provided the government of Bangladesh supported the project financially. Accordingly, I requested the Ambassador to write to the government for according sanction for placing a Professor in the Institute who will occupy the chair. In the meantime I suggested the names of Dr Abdullah Al Muti Sharifuddin and Professor Dr Anisuzzaman for participation in the proposed symposium on

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BCIC Short International Tender Notice

বিসিআইসি'র পণ্য শিল্পায়নে জাতীয় অগ্রগতির প্রতীক

Managing Director, Sylhet Pulp & Paper Mills Ltd., Chhatak, Sunamganj invites two-envelope system sealed tender for supply of 500 M/Ton Soda Ash (L) against Tender No 475 dt 3.10.2000 on C&F Chittagong basis under any suitable credit. Tender documents will be available at Tk 300/- per set from (a) BCIC, 30-31, Dilkusha, Dhaka, (b) BCIC Branch Office, 6, Agrabad, Chittagong and (c) SPPM Ltd, Chhatak, Sunamganj. Tender along with 1% earnest money will be received up to 3-00 PM on 15.11.2000 and technical offer will be opened immediately thereafter. No tender documents will be sold on the date of opening. BCIC-925-11/10/2000 Manager (Commercial) I/C for Managing Director. DFP-24955-16/10 G-1828

BCIC Enlistment Notice

বিসিআইসি'র পণ্য শিল্পায়নে জাতীয় অগ্রগতির প্রতীক

Managing Director, Jamuna Fertilizer Company Ltd., Tarakandi, Sarishabari, Jamalpur invites applications from the bonafide contractor/stockist/manufacturer/suppliers in the prescribed form for enlistment as supplier for the period of 2 (two) years for supply various stores for the years of 2001 & 2002. Application form will be available on payment of Tk. 25/- (twenty-five) only (non-refundable) from (i) The General Manager (A&F), JFCL, Tarakandi, Sarishabari, Jamalpur, (ii) The Controller of Acc'ts., BCIC, 30-31, Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka & (iii) The Sr. General Manager, BCIC Branch Office, 6, Agrabad C/A, Chittagong. Application shall be submitted within 15-11-2000 in normal office hours. Application will not be accepted after expiry date of submission mentioned above. BCIC 932-12/10-2000 DFP-24950-16-10 G-1827

TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera



James Bond



Notice Inviting Tenders

No. 4 of 2000-2001

- Tenders in sealed cover are hereby invited in Form No. 2911 from special class, combined class I (one), class I (one), class II (two) & class III (three) civil approved contractors of this Department for the undermentioned work and will be received by the undersigned/by the Divisional Commissioner, Rajshahi Division, Rajshahi/Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Division, I/II, Rajshahi/Natore/Naogaon and Sub-Divisional Engineer, P.W.D. Sub-Division, Nowabgonj up to 12-00 Noon of 7-11-2000 and will be opened on the same day at 12-15 PM.
- Name of work : Construction of boundary wall around the site of Shishu Paribar at Pabna under the scheme conversion of existing Shishu Sadan into Shishu Paribar (phase-II).
- Estimated cost : Tk. 12,52,681/=.
- Earnest money : Tk. 25,054/= in the form of Sanchaypatra/BD, CD from any scheduled bank. Fixed deposit-holder to submit a certificate from the concerned Executive Engineer received within three months.
- The tender form together with the schedule of items, specification, terms and conditions, plans etc. can be seen and obtained from the office of the undersigned The Divisional Commissioner, Rajshahi Division, Rajshahi/ the Additional Chief Engineer, PWD Zone, Rajshahi/Dhaka/Khulna/Chittagong/ the Executive Engineer, PWD Division, Rajshahi-I/Rajshahi-II/Natore/Naogaon/Bogra/Sirajgonj/ Joypurhat/Rangpur/ Gaibandha/Kurigram/Lalmonirhat/Nilphamari/Dinajpur/Thakurgaon/Panchagarh and Sub-Divisional Engineer, PWD Sub-Division, Nowabgonj during office hours on payment of usual charges up to the previous day of receiving tender.

Md. Shah Alam
Executive Engineer
PWD Division, Pabna.
DFP-24911-16/10
G-1826

