

Role of UN Secretary General : An overview

HARUN UR RASHID

MR. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN, has been currently visiting South Asia including Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh have warm sentiments for him and welcome him with great enthusiasm. Although Bangladesh is not a military and economic power, its commitment to peace is demonstrated by the contribution to UN peace-keeping missions. The professionalism and competence of Bangladesh personnel, the fact that Bangladesh has been a consistent contributor and its willingness to respond readily when circumstances demanded gives it a good standing as a member within the UN. The visit demonstrates the importance the UN attaches to Bangladesh.

Mr. Annan has been the Secretary General since January, 1997. He is the first career UN official to occupy the highest post in the UN Secretariat. He replaced Egyptian Dr. Boutros Ghali.

Mr. Kofi Annan is known to be a very warm person, shy in some ways but he has a great range of friends. His kindness to staff and his capacity to attract and act as a mentor to staff is believed to be remarkable.

He is an insider and knows how the UN Secretariat works with various interest groups within the organisation. The G-7 industrialised countries pay most of the budget of the UN and they have a powerful voice on every subject in the UN. Most importantly a Secretary General cannot afford to displease the US as it contributes the most in comparison to other countries.

His visit has raised speculation in the media that the "real" purpose of his visit is to enlist support from South Asia in the event of his candidacy for another term as the Secretary General. Some argue that it is now Asia's turn to fill up the position. Both Dr. Ghali and Mr. Annan belong to African region and when Mr. Annan completes his term it will be ten years for that region to hold the position.

It is often said that the UN Charter has three core objectives: maintenance of international peace and security, promotion of human rights and assistance in development. All these three are equally important to maintain a stable and just world. Growth and development is not possible unless there is peace and security. Development eradicates poverty which in turn advances the cause of human rights.

The UN is not a supra-national government. It is a political organisation in which the member states agree to act together. However

some states are more than equal than others and the US dominates the organisation because its military and economic strength coupled with technological superiority is unassailable.

The Secretary General is appointed by the General Assembly of the UN upon the recommendation of the Security Council. The five permanent members of the Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia and the US) must agree on a candidate and if any one of them objects to a candidate, he/she is ruled out from the contest.

Generally speaking the position rotates largely among the geographical groups Asia, Africa, Americas

of the tests appears to be : how successful the incumbent has been to achieve UN's core objectives? That means precisely three things: Is the world more peaceful than in the past? Has the inequality between rich and poor countries reduced? Have the human rights been seen as an integral element of good governance by the member states?

If we look hard at the questions, the answers are not easy.

Sadly Africa remains the home of war of today's world from the civil war in Angola to the anarchy in Somalia and Sierra Leone to the war waged in the very heart of Africa, Congo. Iraq appears to be a prob-

often it seems that the UN gets involved not in peace keeping but in peace-making efforts.

The question is : What is the role of the Secretary General ?

It all depends on the personality of the Secretary General. Although the powers of the Secretary General are limited, he can wield immense power by the force of intellect, courage, drive and persuasion. It could be argued that although the Queen of Britain possesses no real powers, she could influence her Prime Minister's actions if necessary. Similarly the Secretary General must gain the confidence and trust of the major powers to influence them to do what is best for the international community.

Furthermore, many argue that although many reforms have been undertaken within the structure of the UN, in many cases the UN has been found to be slow to respond to crisis. They argue that UN culture needs to change transforming rule-driven organisation to produce concrete results.

One first thrust seems to be the creation of a customer driven environment. The answer for every problem should not be always another programme or more money. Another change appears to be removing the need of producing too many unnecessary documents and paper work by the UN. Many of the documents are full of more of the same, more of the sort of statements that convey self-evident truth such as "the sun rises in the east".

In essence they believe that the UN should be customer-focused, goal-oriented organisation. In sport there is a saying, "no pain no gain". So the UN may have to undergo this painful process.

Although Asian group may hold the view that the position rightfully belongs to them after the expiry of the term of the incumbent Secretary General, there is a view among some Western countries that since the West will continue to control the UN, a person from a Western country should fill in the vacancy. Furthermore they argue that the position was held by the developing countries for 20 years and it is time now for a person from the industrialised countries to occupy the position. Another view appears to be that a woman should hold the position so that a new perspective can be brought to bear in the activities of the UN.

However the bottom line is that the five permanent members of the Security Council will decide the next candidate. Many believe that Mr. Kofi Annan may emerge as the consensus candidate.

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Shahed Latif : The end of an odyssey

DR. MIZANUR RAHMAN SHELLEY

PAST and present blended in an exquisite mosaic in his personality as it throbbed with the pulsations of an ever-living present. For my friend, Shahed Latif, life was a loving adventure which brought its own reward. To him every end was a new beginning as he moved dauntlessly from one phase of life to another. Those of us who were his friends from childhood never ceased to wonder at his seemingly limitless energy and enthusiasm at every turn of life. Now that he has breathed his last on the 13th of March, his entire action-packed life unfolds before our tearful eyes as a virtual Odyssey of a modern Ulysses.

Shahed was the epitome of our generation; veritable "mid nights children" whose age had not reached the double figure when the sub-continent was divided in 1947 in blood and fire. Like the rest of his friends he grew to adolescent and youth through the exiting politico-economic tumults of the fifties and sixties. Ours was a joint journey from 1953 to 1962 and beyond. It started at Dhaka's St Gregory School in 1953 and continued through 57 and 59 at the Dhaka College where he as a student of intermediate science and I of arts. In 1959 we got admitted to the Dhaka University as students of B.A Honors class with our hearts full of excitement and eyes aglow with distant dreams. Shahed did his B.A Honors in economics and I in political science in 1962.

Then our ways parted for a brief time. Shahed successfully competed in the central superior service examination and became a member of the cartwheel Civil Service of Pakistan (1964 batch). I followed suite three years later after serving as a teacher in the Dhaka University from 1964 to 1967 then in 1968 and 69 we met off and on in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar [where he was the sub-divisional officer (SDO) in 1969].

After a brief tenure of service under the then West Pakistan Government Shahed returned to serve in the Secretariat in Dhaka as Deputy Secretary to the then provincial Government. This was in the early seventies.

During his days as student in the college and University, as during the time in school, he was a thorough and serious student, but he never failed in sparing ample time for play and friendly fellowship with his numerous friends: Masoom Chowdhury, Nasim K. Rahman, Ahab Ahmed, Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, Abul Manzur Shahed Kamal, myself and many others. He was active in students' social and cultural organizations and quietly but friendly participated in the progressive and liberal politics of the East Pakistan Students' Union (EPSU) fighting for the cause of freedom of intellect and the rights of the people of East Bengal.

I led a different students' organization, the students force, defunct since 1964, which also espoused the cause of social justice and assertion of the rights of the people of East Bengal. Our belonging to different students' political platforms did not make any dent on our profound friendship which stood the tests and trials of nearly five decades of convulsive socio-political happenings. That was also in keeping with the tenor of our youthful times when humanity mattered most and friendship bridged gulf of difference in socio-political values. Shahed was among those who firmly believed that "man is the measure of man" and continued to value friendship and fellow feeling throughout his life without compromising essential principles.

That was why during the preparations of the war of liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, he had no hesitation in joining the forces of freedom along with some other brave souls of the erstwhile CSP serving in the erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971. He signed a resolution of the CSP association in Dhaka fearlessly, supporting the cause of self assertion of the Bengalees of the then East Pakistan.

Throughout his working life he remained dedicated to his job in the service of the public. Whether at the national or international level he worked with unflinching commitment and extraordinary competence as a civil servant. A joint secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh at FAO at Rome (late 70s), and a highly placed UN official at the ESCAP in Bangkok (early 80s to late 90s) Shahed

worked with dedication, zeal, composure, and superb managerial skill to earn the heartfelt admiration and praise from his colleagues and friends. Earlier, shortly after the liberation of Bangladesh, he served as the first general manager of the eastern milk producer co-operative Milk Vita project and worked tirelessly to build up the institution on a sound and solid footing despite the uncertainties and dislocations typical of a newly emerged state born in blood and brimstone. That organization stands today as an undying memento to the dedication, commitment and matchless managerial skill of Shahed Latif.

During the penultimate years of his life, even as deadly cancer engaged him in a fatal struggle, he began another fresh phase of his career as the first managing director of Grameen Telecom. Dr. Mohammad Yunus the founder of the Grameen movement is a master in talent scouting and he couldn't possibly scout better. Shahed was a keystone in the growing arch of the Grameen telephone system and his premature demise is an irreparable loss to the Grameen institution in particular and to Bangladesh in General.

His departure is not only that of a skilled manager and civil servant but more so of a superb analyst of society and development and sensitive poet for, above all, Shahed was essentially a good human being, he was a loving son and affectionate father. He enjoyed the kind and caring love of his father and mother, the Dean of engineers Mr. Abdul Latif and Mrs. Latif, respectively. He was proud of the affection he enjoyed from his loving

uncle Mr. A. Akib and the love he got from his only brother Brigadier General Zahed Latif Retd and his sister Nilu Mrs. Kazi Zafarullah. In his own turn he drenched his kith and kin, his friends and his small family, consisting of loving wife Panna (Zubaida Latif), son Emon and daughter Mon Ami with a love and affection which only the purest of hearts can generously bestow.

He was also deeply involved in all human kind and particularly concerned with the welfare of society and the individuals who composed it. He took time out from his busy schedule as a government and UN official to contribute thought provoking and profoundly analytical writings to periodicals and dailies among which The Daily Star figured most prominently. Mahfuz Anam, the editor of The Daily Star, was instrumental in getting Shahed to write and publish his thoughts on society and the development process. His column in the Star, Window on Asia was a rich melange of exiting concepts and a uniquely simple style which told the story as it was.

As in his writings on society and economy so also in his quiet pursuit of writing poetry he came out in his essential self as a straight and honest human being with a free intellect and crystal clear heart.

We were his co-authors on our first publication of poems (Kobita Shankolon Chhoy poetry collection six) Dhaka 1969. There were six of us Shahed, Masoom, Masud, Reza, Shahed Kamal and myself. Later in eighties we co-authored another volume of poems called Mukhor Aranye the Eloquent Wilderness. In this volume Shahed was in the company of Ataur Rahman Kaiser, Razaur Rahman, Delwar Hossain Khan, Ahab Ahmed, Syed Abdus Samad and myself. He also had a book of poems to his credit "Hridoyer Chhilekothay" (Heart in the Attic).

However, it was in one of his early poems in Kobita Shankolon Chhoy that he wrote what feels today like his elegy:

"Research goes on ceaselessly. To find out how to separate sleep from life

And life from sleep." Now that Shahed Latif has been claimed by Eternal Sleep, that quest has become redundant. Nevertheless life goes on, as Shahed himself would have liked it to go on for his zest for life seemed everlasting. That was why the end of every phase of his life was, to him, the start of a new odyssey. We will not meet him again this side of eternity. When we meet him on the other side we hope we will find that the end of his odyssey on earth heralded a splendid new beginning.



Excerpts from the main report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission of Inquiry as declassified by Government of Pakistan

POLITICAL BACKGROUND: X

It might be convenient here to digress and state the position of West Pakistani parties on the Six Points programme before and after the election. By and large most of the parties in the West did openly oppose the Six Points programme. It has been alleged that Pakistan Peoples Party alone did not. It is ironical, that is so, that after the elections it is People's Party which should be the most vociferous in its opposition while the opposition of the others became milder. We think it is true to say that while the others at no time gave up opposition to the undiluted Six Points programme, generally speaking they had a viewpoint in the post-election period opposed to that of the Pakistan Peoples Party. It is quote true that the Pakistan Peoples Party leader in most of the party's public meetings did not expressly join issue with the Six Points but conducted the campaign generally upon a socialist programme.

With this background General Yahya went to East Pakistan. The evidence of Admiral Ahsan casts a curious light upon the preparedness of General Yahya and his team for discussions with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. We have referred earlier to what appears to us to be a lack of any study of the Six Points programme. On the 6th of January, 1971, General Pirzada, the Principal Staff Officer to General Yahya, called on the Governor of East Pakistan, Admiral Ahsan, and asked him to obtain a copy of the Six Points programme because he said that on the next day the President would be discussing it with Mujibur Rahman and his colleagues. That at this

stage the presidential team did not have so much as a copy of the Six Points programme is in itself a shocking eye-opener. However, the Admiral expressly asked whether the Six Points programme have been analysed so as to bring out its defects and deficiencies and enable the President to ask pertinent questions and General Pirzada answered that no such analysis had been done and that what was contemplated the next day was merely a brief session there would be other occasions for more detailed discussions.

Accordingly, the next day a meeting was held. Besides General Yahya Khan there were present the PSO and Admiral Ahsan while the Awami League was represented by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mr Tajuddin, Mr Nazrul Islam, Mr Qamaruzzaman, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad and Captain Mansoor Ali. Mujib presented his Six Points programme and answered a few questions which General Yahya raised and then asked (we quote from the evidence of Admiral Ahsan):-

"You now know what the Six Points programme is, please tell me what objections you have to this programme."

The very phrasing of this question is suggestive. General Yahya is said to have answered that he himself had nothing against the Six Points programme but Mujib would have to carry the West Pakistani leaders with him to which the latter replied: "Of course kindly call the Assembly as soon as possible. I suggest 15th of February, 1971. You will see that I will obtain not only a

simple majority but almost 2/3 majority."

One might pause to remark that while this answer certainly did not mean that Mujibur Rahman would give up the Six-Point programme the reference to the 2/3 majority equally clearly meant that he would carry with him at least some of the West Pakistani votes which would in turn mean not necessarily that he would bargain with West Pakistan but at least that he would be able to persuade some of the West Pakistani members to his point of view.

To continue with the account of the meeting, Admiral Ahsan then remarked that with an absolute majority the Awami League could bulldoze their constitution through without bothering about West Pakistan's interests and to this Mujib's answer is interesting:-

"No, I am a democrat and the majority leader of all Pakistan. I cannot ignore the interests of West Pakistan. I am not only responsible to the people of East and West Pakistan but also to world opinion. I shall do every thing on democratic principles. To begin with I hope you will arrive in Dacca 3 or 4 days before the Assembly session. I will show you our draft constitution. If you find objections I will try to accommodate your wishes. As a leader of the majority party I will prepare a draft for the President's address to the Assembly. I will express my gratitude to you in the Assembly for restoring democracy. Then we shall go through all the process of a democratic parliament. We will have the subjects committees, we will discuss the issues and

find acceptable formulas inside and outside the Assembly."

Now in view of what followed, this is a remarkable statement.

Clearly if this answer is taken at its face value Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, although not talking of a pre-assembly consultation, was thinking in terms of the usual give and take in parliamentary affairs inside the House and in the lobby. He was thinking of accommodating West Pakistan and yet sticking to the Six-Point programme. Now what was there in the Six-Point programme which would need the consideration of West Pakistan's interests? In a federal system in which the centre had hardly any function there would be no need of saving East Pakistan's interests against the West Pakistan or vice versa. Indeed in the constitution to be set up under the Six Points programme the central assembly itself would have hardly any function to perform. The accommodation therefore of West Pakistan's interests at this stage would appear to mean the accommodation of that point of view of West Pakistan which was in favour of a centre which if not strong would at least be more than merely nominal; in other words it meant ensuring the continued existence of Pakistan as one country not merely in name but in some real sense, and yet the Sheikh had earlier spoken of the Six-Point programme and of his ability to carry it through the House by a 2/3 majority.

Next: POLITICAL BACKGROUND-XI

Farewell, Shahed Bhai

SHAMSHER M. CHOWDHURY, BB

GROWING up in Dhaka in the fifties in the company of my cousins from Bailey Road, it was inescapable to hear of their friends. Shahed Bhai was a close friend of Masum Bhai and once every while his name would feature in the course of our conversations.

My first real encounter with Shahed Bhai was shortly after the country's liberation. Masum Bhai was hosting a dinner at their Surma house in Dhanmondi and Shahed Bhai was among the guests. I was still using crutches to walk with, yet still having recovered from my war injuries. During the course of the evening, he walked upto me and said, "let me shake the hands of a real hero."

It was not till many years later when I was working in the Bangladesh Embassy in Rome that I got to know him more closely. There came his own posting to Rome as Economic Minister in the Embassy and I got to know Panna and their wonderful children. The memories of Rome are many, and like the city itself, perhaps eternal.

Shahed Bhai, you were a great colleague, cooperative to the core and I could always count on you for support and wise counselling when needed. Your turn of the century flat was my weekend haunt for, among many other things, the Ghono Dudh that Panna made for me. With first Mr. Shamsur Rahman, with his incredible knowledge of history, and later with Mr. Abul Ahsan, with his inimitable style of talking and wit, as our Ambassadors there, we made a wonderful team in the Embassy.

In 1981, you took a new road professionally and joined the UN

system with ESCAP in Bangkok. I recall clearly that our government's clearance for your move to ESCAP was followed by dramatic political developments back home that almost made your joining ESCAP somewhat uncertain. I remember that afternoon when you walked into my office and sought my advice whether you should proceed to Bangkok straightaway or wait for instructions from Dhaka in view of the emerging developments there. We talked, looked at all the possibilities, and finally I suggested that since you were so keen to move to the UN system, it would perhaps be advisable for you to fly to Bangkok without any further delay, if necessary by buying your own ticket. And so you did, leaving Panna, Emon and Monami for the time being in Rome. While I could not but have felt happy on the new course of life that you had chosen for yourself, I knew that for Bangladesh it was surely a loss of a civil servant of a rare breed. Panna and the children left Rome for Bangkok soon afterwards.

As I moved from Rome to Washington, to Canada and to China, our paths did not cross for sometime. It was only when I was returning to Dhaka after completing my assignment in Beijing that we met in Bangkok in 1988. Emon and Monami had grown up, you were enjoying your work in ESCAP and Panna was loving Bangkok and had even begun to paint.

Like most, if not all, things in life, our destinies are ordained. I was to become a member of your family by marrying Lita, to whom you were always an elder brother, not just a cousin. It was indeed pleasantly fortuitous that you could be in Dhaka for our wedding along with Emon. It

meant a lot to us. Sadly, it was also the last time you saw your Chhoti Chachi, my mother-in-law, Laila Samad, who left us shortly afterwards.

During my assignment in Colombo, we got to see each other a lot because on all the trips that Lita and I made between Dhaka and Colombo, Bangkok, and your lovely flat with all its human warmth, was our regular transit stop. You and Panna visited us in Colombo and we had a lovely few days together, driving to various parts of the beautiful island country, from the cave temples of Dambulla, to the beaches in the South and the forests of Yala. You and Panna also came and stayed with us in Bonn in Germany. There was never a dull moment.

One would only like to remember the pleasant times and blank out the anguish and pain of your illness. But to someone who was so close, one cannot but try to at least to share some of your own pains. You were brave, and more importantly, even in your own moment of suffering, you remembered others. I shall never forget that moment when I called you in Hong Kong from Hanoi, when you were being treated, one of the first things you asked was how my ageing mother was. That was most touching.

During my last trip to Dhaka, Lita and I tried to spend as much time as we could with you, but now I wish I had done more, much more.

I remember one evening when I was sitting next to your bed, you were regretting having joined the Civil Service so early in your life and not having gone abroad for higher studies and seeing more of the world. I reminded you of Robert

Frost's famous poem, "..... two roads diverged in the woods, and I, I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference." I said if you had gone abroad for studies then, maybe you would not have gotten such a partner in life as Panna, who gave you so much happiness and two lovely children. You agreed and even said that you had translated those immortal lines by Robert Frost into Bangla and that you would find them for me. On my last night in Dhaka this time, you told me that since you and Panna had visited Lita and me in Colombo and Bonn, you would visit us in Hanoi too and you said it would be more for us and not so much for the country. But then, perhaps in a chilling realisation of the truth, you said "in this state of my illness, maybe we shall never meet again".

Well Shahed Bhai, you have made your prophecy come true. But remember, you still owe me your Bangla version of Robert Frost's great lines "..... I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference."

Shahed Bhai, while I cannot even begin to fathom the sense of loss for Panna, Emon and Monami, I can tell you what I do know: in your passing, Lita has lost her brother, Raquib Chacha has lost a son and I, I have lost a friend and a guide and the society has lost yet another fine person.

May you rest in eternal peace.

The regular column HAVE A NICE DAY is held over for Monday next

Garfield

