

BNP-PP is not the Parliament

A tragic precedent but a welcome show of dignity

DR. A.Q.M. Badruddoza's unceremonious exit from the highest office of the state has been perniciously without a precedent, extra-constitutional and, therefore, unconstitutional as well. If the 'requested', and forced resignation put to him as a *fait accompli* is the manifestation of unconstitutionality, then its roots lay deeper in two extremely valid questions of constitutional propriety: first and foremost, could the BNP parliamentary party, just because of its majority in the JS, ask their once-nominated but since elected President of the Republic on oath to step down under whatever guise and euphemism? In other words, was the parliamentary party the right forum, the constitutionally approved mechanism and democratically established normative medium through which the head of the state could be asked to resign? The answers to these questions are, self-evidently, 'no'. First of all, the idea that a president stays in office on the pleasure of a ruling party's parliamentary party is thoroughly repugnant to any institutional sensibilities about the president's relations with the executive and the parliament. It may be expedient to a bankrupt and circuitous way of thinking, but it's dangerously prone to a systemic self-destruction. Secondly, the parliamentary party and the parliament are not one and the same thing. Parliament is made up of the ruling party and the opposition, so that BNP parliamentary party could not act Goliath with the institution of parliament in relation to a matter that involved the president. It cannot pretend to be larger than the nation's political life. Not insignificantly also, a four-party alliance government is in power, so that the BNP even as a leading partner could not act on its own without reflecting a majoritarian arrogance to the rest.

The second fundamental question to ask is: was the BNP parliamentary party's request or demand that the president resign really binding on him? The answer has to be 'no', again in terms of the constitution as explained by some legal luminaries of the country. We would have preferred if the president had not given the credence he lent to the BNPP's request to quit; but at the same time his deferential attitude merits a plaudit for two reasons: first, he has acted as a man of great dignity, decency and understanding by not trying to cling to a position he could not make a good job of without spontaneous support from his ruling party colleagues.

More importantly, perhaps, he has saved the nation a further bout with trouble by deciding against taking the matter to its bitter end which would have happened had he refused to resign. One wishes though that while resigning Dr. Badruddoza had made a pointer to the distinction between parliament and a parliamentary party by way of recording his opinion on a bad precedent otherwise set for the parliamentary system of government. Godspeed to his life in retirement.

We protest the assault on media men

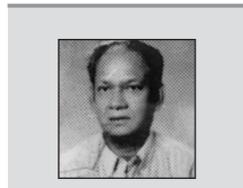
A norm on VIP coverage should be prepared to assist journalists' work

WE strongly protest the way journalists and photo-journalists were treated by the SSF and police at the entrance of Bangabhaban where they were trying to talk to the departing President as a part of their professional duty. Even when Prof. Chowdhury had stopped to speak to them the security people were dragging the media men away, assaulting many in the process. A few camera and mobile phones of the waiting journalists were either destroyed or damaged. In a separate incident, the secretary to the former Speaker and now acting President literally pushed journalists out of his room while he was talking to them. Regrettably, in either case no one came to the rescue of the journalists who were doing their job.

Why are the media persons so shabbily treated by the security personnel and officials? People have a right to know what is going on and our government is committed to sharing all relevant information with the people. It was to carry out that fundamental function -- of keeping people informed -- that journalists flocked to Bangabhaban. What could be more newsworthy than the resignation of the President?

So the question is why should the media professionals be assaulted while carrying out their professional work? This is not the first time that journalists have been assaulted while covering the VIPs. Whenever foreign dignitaries visit Bangladesh the journalists covering the event, especially the photo-journalists, bear the brunt of official misbehaviour. This must be stopped once and for all. We demand that security personnel and the police be given strict instructions not to assault the journalists. As is done in every democratic country, norms should be set up which will include obligatory press briefing and photo opportunities on occasions like these. We do not want to interfere with the work of the security personnel nor do we want anybody interfering with ours.

Afghanistan's Loya Jirga: Old way to new order?



ARSHAD-UZ-ZAMAN

LOYA Jirga or the council of tribal elders has been held in Kabul. They have elected Hamid Karzai as the President of Afghanistan. A new page has been opened in Afghanistan.

It would be foolhardy to think that the question of a regime settling down in Afghanistan is immediately on the cards. The country has not only been locked in a civil war for nearly two decades, but there is uneasy coexistence between the north and the south and southeast.

The immediate past history of Afghanistan is a painful one. It has been a long history of power vacuum and efforts by neighbours to get Afghanistan under their control. Thus Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union in the late seventies and throughout the eighties a bitter conflict ensued between the Soviet forces and the Afghan forces fully backed by an undeclared

coalition led by the US. The coalition was bankrolled by Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf Arabs. The frontier areas of Pakistan and particularly the city of Peshawar became the headquarters for the military operation against the Soviet forces. Soviet Union was bled white and had a humiliating retreat to within her borders. This Afghan misadventure played no insignificant role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the US was not involved

one of the principal religions of humanity and is spreading in Christian countries of the West.

The Taliban regime was recognised by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia but none else. It is because of the fact that Pakistan was the only backer of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, that a coldness grew in the relations between Pakistan and Iran, which also has a long border with Afghanistan and shares the Shia faith with many in Afghanistan.

came out of the brain of a Saudi millionaire Osama Bin Laden, who had taken refuge under the protection of Molla Omar, boss of the Taliban Government in Afghanistan. The US declared war on terrorism and organised a mighty force to hit at Afghanistan to oust the Taliban regime. Since the entry into landlocked Afghanistan is mainly through Pakistan, the Government of Gen Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan eagerly joined hands with the

Qaida network activists, Pakistan has joined hands. This is fraught with danger for Pakistan because the area where the US operation is continuing is inhabited by fiercely independent Pathan tribesmen, who guard very jealously their way of life.

Along with the search for members of the Al-Qaida network under US leadership, a new regime has been put in place in Afghanistan. The person who has emerged as

Rabbani's men fought against the Taliban during the decade-long rule of the Taliban.

These new dispensations have taken place under the watchful eye of superpower US, who has been fully assisted by Great Britain, who during her imperial days, used to make and unmake regimes in Kabul. With the arrival of the US on the scene it would seem that a new page of the Great Game has started. For the US has not only come to Afghanistan but has landed troops in newly independent Central Asian states, who have splintered from the former Soviet Union.

We must note that the Central Asian states, who are mainly around the Caspian Sea, are very rich in oil and gas and the US is the major player in the world of energy. The regime of Hamid Karzai will have to grapple with the problems of oil and gas pipeline, which will pass through Afghan territory, to energy hungry countries like India and Pakistan.

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Arshad-uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

We must note that the Central Asian states, who are mainly around the Caspian Sea, are very rich in oil and gas and the US is the major player in the world of energy. The regime of Hamid Karzai will have to grapple with the problems of oil and gas pipeline, which will pass through Afghan territory, to energy hungry countries like India and Pakistan. As the new order takes shape in Afghanistan, a new world is emerging in Central Asia and the Great Game has started in right earnest, with the newest entrant -- the USA.

with men, she withdrew from the scene and a total vacuum ensued in Afghanistan. Pakistan quickly seized the opportunity and installed the "Taliban" regime. The Taliban were for the main part Pushtu speaking tribesmen from the Frontier area and had been thoroughly brainwashed in the Madrasas. They were out and out Islamic fanatics or to use the current terminology, fundamentalists. They behaved as if they had created Islam and brought dishonour and disrepute to what is

Pakistan and Iran had cordial relations for half a century.

Some astonishing events have brought about a downfall of the Taliban regime. On 11 September 2001, the US for the first time of its 200-year history was attacked from within and her Twin Towers in New York and part of Pentagon in Washington DC were destroyed. This event shook superpower US to its foundation and President George W Bush had to find a target and retaliate. This massive terrorists attack

US in its campaign against Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban. Thus Pakistan did a 180 degree turn and ditched its own creation, the Taliban.

Pakistan's motive simply was to join the US bandwagon and get out of the isolation in which it had landed following the military coup of Gen Musharraf. Before the armed might of the US the Taliban disintegrated and the US forces are scouring the hills of Afghanistan to find out Bin Laden and Molla Omar, both fugitive. In this search for Taliban and Al-

the top man is Hamid Karzai. He has so far adroitly handled the situation and has kept the Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north in reasonably good humour. Fortunately for Karzai he has obtained the blessing of King Zahir Shah, who inaugurated the meeting, which elected Karzai as the top leader. Burhanuddin Rabbani, another powerful figure, who had been replaced by the Taliban in Kabul, is also reported to have endorsed the leadership of Karzai. It must be remembered that

Big brother is watching you!

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

IN a scenario eerily reminiscent of George Orwell's widely acclaimed futuristic novel *Nineteen Eighty-four* (from which is the caption above is borrowed) dwelling on the theme of authoritarianism, the British Government is preparing to widen the scope of the law called Regulation of Investigative Powers Act to give practically all central and local government departments in the UK the right to monitor and intercept all electronically exchanged communications between individuals and institutions. In other words, as soon as the law comes into force, the communications records of every British telephone -- landlines and mobile phones included -- and internet user will become subject to snooping by a host of government departments, local councils and quangos. The Regulation of Investigative Powers Act was actually passed two years ago, but so far only police forces, the intelligence services, Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue have enjoyed power of surveillance over these records. For the police, any officer of Superintendent rank or above can demand an individual's records without a court order. Now, ministers apparently want to extend the right to demand communications data to seven Whitehall departments, every local authority in the country, NHS (National Health Services) bodies in Scotland and Northern Ireland and eleven other public bodies ranging from the Postal Services Commission to the Food Standards Agency. Under the revised Act, therefore, each of these authorities will be able to demand, without a court order, that phone companies, internet service providers and postal operators hand over detailed information on individuals, such as their names and addresses, telephone calls made and received, sources and destinations of e-mails, the identity of websites visited and mobile phone location data which can pinpoint the users' whereabouts within a few metres at any given time.

It is not that the British government is doing all this on their own. The basic plans were drawn up by Europol, the police and intelligence

arm of the European Union at a private meeting held in The Hague in April this year of police, intelligence services and customs and excise officials from across Europe. The draft document lists ten areas where communications companies will be required to preserve all information and hand it over on demand "in order to help in the fight against international terrorism, domestic crime and drug running". The National High-tech Crime Unit in Britain, which will be overseeing the implementation of plans for data retention in this country, is of the opinion that the spiralling growth of 'cyber crime' means that new powers are needed to keep ahead of the criminals. The Home Office also insists that the extended powers are necessary to fight terrorism and

to a systematic attack on the right to privacy." The print and electronic media have also expressed fear that the extended Act may undermine investigative journalism. Editors are worried that the identities of sources may become impossible to protect. A spokesperson for the Society of Editors says: "The more we widen these powers..... the greater becomes the propensity for people to misuse them to find out where a journalist is getting material for a critical story." Someone else raised another valid point: "Even if we accept that in 99 per cent cases the information on individuals will be used judicially, what about the rights of the remaining 1 per cent?"

If the revised Act is passed in Parliament -- and it is likely that it will be -- the extended powers will

Government has been getting ready to fight terrorism and crime with vastly extended powers, a survey conducted by a major Sunday newspaper has revealed the biggest rise in criminal offences for a decade and the justice system in disarray. The survey report shows that the overall number of offences in England and Wales rose by over 6 per cent by March this year, and figures shortly to be released by the Government will show that 38 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales have seen an increase in the total number of crimes -- on average, nearly 850 more crimes were reported every day this year than during the previous year. Lord Falconer, the Home Office minister in charge of overhauling Britain's criminal justice system, has admit-

ted in a forthright interview with a leading national daily that the majority of people seem to "have a deep and profound sense that the criminal justice system is failing them" and they are probably right to think so. With crime now a critical political issue, the Government's own figures are bound to cause acute embarrassment to Whitehall as they reverse a long-standing trend of falling crime since the early 1990s broken only once briefly in 1999. But the first quarter of the current year shows an unexpected surge in burglaries and street crimes fuelled, as experts claim, by increasing use of heroin and crack cocaine.

The Shadow Home Secretary, Oliver Letwin, has been severely critical of the Government's failure to fulfil its commitment to cut down crime rates. "There is not even any prospect," he said, "of the Home Secretary (David Blunket) making a serious impact on crime in Britain over the remainder of this Parlia-

ment." Mr Letwin himself has come up with a plan to prevent an upsurge in crime in the years to come. He suggests that teachers should be trained to spot criminal tendencies in children from the age of four. Youngsters identified as likely to commit crimes later in life should receive counselling and parents should be offered advice on how to prevent them becoming criminals. But although Mr Letwin may believe that his plan could help solve the problem of youth crime, a leading child psychiatrist has warned of the dangers of branding children criminals. He said: "It is not going to work if you say to parents: We think your little Johnny is a potential mugger."

The dream merchants
NOW on to a subject nearer home, and perhaps the hearts, for many

blockbuster hits like *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, *The Phantom of the Opera* etc.

Produced at a cost of £4.5 million, *Bombay Dreams* recently opened at the Apollo Victoria Theatre in London. The music for the play has been composed and choreographed by none other than A. R. Rahman, who is probably the most popular music director in the Indian film industry today. The storyline is just conventional Bollywood *massala* -- a poor young man from the slums falls for the beautiful daughter of a prominent film maker, is given the chance to act in films and soon becomes a superstar and the heart throb of millions. But although success briefly alienates him from his erstwhile fellow slum-dwellers, it does not take him long to come back to his senses and realise that friendship and true love are more important than the glamour and glitter of tinsel town. So after a climactic fight with the arch-villain and his stooges -- and its predictable conclusion -- the hero and the heroine walk off, hand in hand, towards the sunset, or perhaps the sunrise (does it really matter?).

I and some friends went to see the play one Saturday afternoon and found the theatre packed to capacity, which is not surprising for an Andrew Lloyd Webber play in the first few weeks of its run. But what really impressed me was the proportion of *sahibs* and *memsahibs* among the audience -- they far outnumbered the likes of us, that is, South East Asians. They all wore looks of eager anticipation on their faces, and as the play began, the whoops of delight with which they greeted every new scene and the thunderous applause that followed every song sung in true Bollywood style proved beyond any question that there was a sure winner right before our eyes. First, *chicken tikka massala*, which has already usurped the place of honour from fish and chips as the UK's favourite dish, and now, Bollywood -- the Asianisation of Britain is nearly complete!

LONDON LETTER

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crime in an age when communication is increasingly taking place via electronic means such as e-mails or mobile phones. A number of civil liberties group, however, have been scathingly critical of the ensuing Act. An internet thinktank, the Foundation for Information Policy Research, declares to be "appalled at this huge increase in the scope of Government snooping. Two years ago, we were deeply concerned that these powers were to be given to the police without any judicial oversight. Now they are handing them out to a practically endless queue of bureaucrats in Whitehall and town halls."

Another civil rights organisation, Privacy International, accuses the Home Office of breaching its commitment that "this law would not become a general surveillance power for the government. The exhaustive list of organisations who will be able to access data without a court order proves that this amounts

come into force in August, which is not very far away. So the message is quite clear "Beware, Big Brother will soon be watching you!"

Post scriptum

However, in a new twist to the situation which has generated considerable controversy, the Government has already taken one step backward faced with the threat of MPs blocking the proposals, dismissed as a snoopers' charter. Peers had been due to vote on the issue on June 18, but the Home Office said that because of "immetable difficulties" the debate had been put back, probably to July 1. But Whitehall sources admitted ministers wanted time to draw up safeguards to reassure the critics. Meanwhile the Conservative leader in the House of Lords welcomed the retreat and said that the Government should drop the plans altogether.

Crime rate hits the ceiling
CALL it coincidence, but as the

readers of this column -- Bollywood. Themes dealing with India and Indian films have occupied a prominent place in the UK this year. In the wake of the spectacular success of the Oscar-nominated film *Lagaan*, as well as films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* at the box-office, enterprising promoters have organised a number of concerts of Indian music and star-studded extravaganza which have attracted South East Asian and Western audiences in almost equal proportions. A few weeks ago, a month-long exhibition of Indian artefacts, fashion and culinary arts concluded at Selfridges, one of London's largest and most prestigious department stores. The focal point of this exhibition was a scaled down replica of the home of Bollywood film star Dimple Kapadia. The latest in this string of events is *Bombay Dreams*, a colourful musical stage-play presented by Andrew Lloyd Webber, the producer of

round. And the very fact that our PM has to "issue instructions" to arrest the killers proves it beyond a shred of doubt that the claim "law will take its own course" is a total farce in this country.

A Distressed Observer
Chittagong

Private terminal
This is in regards to the article about the comments by Col. Akbar regarding the private container terminal. He must be living in some socialist utopia to propose a ceiling on the number of containers that can be handled by the private terminal. How on earth can he defend such a move? Does he think that businessmen are idiots?

Chittagong port, if run efficiently will be able to compete with SSA. If the port continues to remain a nest of gangsters and smugglers then naturally businessmen will switch their containers to the private terminal.

One of the greatest hurdles to the development of our export industry is the sorry state of Chittagong port and unfortunately no government will ever have the guts to take on the unions who really own this vital resource.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



The President

Have you taken a look at the BBC report on the Internet regarding the resignation of the President?

My friends have asked me if people of Bangladesh are so immature that their representatives sound so downright dumb. I had no answer for their question. Today I am ashamed to be a Bangladeshi. I denounce those who have done this to us. It is the fault of the people that they have leaders who are nincompoops. We have had good presidents i.e. Shahabuddin Ahmed and Dr. Chowdhury. I congratulate the President for being a gentleman and not getting into the gutter. Seems like he has that rare trait among politicians: dignity. Farewell Mr. President and God bless!

Yahya USA

Troubled times ahead

On June 22, the BBC had some more scary news about Khaleda's action. The article hints that BNP will use its overwhelming parliamentary majority to try and strengthen the powers of the presidency at the expense of Parliament. According to the BBC, one of the

reasons for this ignominious action was the fear that the President wouldn't have gone along with it.

According to the BBC article "Bangladesh must now function for some time without a president, and with a Prime Minister who has never had so much power."

Khaleda Zia has a huge majority in parliament, armed forces whose most senior officers are her supporters and a civil service containing many of her party's appointees. It appears that dissent will not be tolerated."

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/english/world/south_asia/newsid_205800/0/2058208.stm

Is democracy doomed? What is even more frightening is that Sheikh Hasina is our only recourse to counter BNP's autocratic plans.

I don't know much about the new President, Mr. Sircar. But I do know that a man who in his inaugural press meeting as acting President allows his Personal Secretary to misbehave with reporters is not much of a leader. Added to this is the obvious fact that none other than a BNP sycophant will be tolerated doesn't speak well of Mr. Sircar.

MA

Dhaka

Another political showdown in Bangladesh

It is unfortunate that a person of Prof. Badruddoza's calibre, a long time BNP party person is removed by the party. The reason being given seems so trivial that one cannot help thinking that there maybe something else involved.

Maybe, he and Dr. Kamal Hossain, two good intellectual and perhaps honest men can form a third party and give people an alternative. In the excitement about this news, people forget one other important news that came out the same day. It seems that AL has decided to return to the Parliament. If this is true then I think this is real progress for the country. No more street politics and insecurity for the ordinary people. We hope.

Khan Zahid
Saudi Arabia

"Hostage to hartal forever!"

In reply to Mr Masroor Ahmed Deepak, I am forced to say that he is

thinking with a one-track mind as he accuses me of taking up 'unnecessary newspaper space'.

First of all, we all have a right to express ourselves, and the decision to use up "the unnecessary newspaper space" was taken by the Star authority. Living in a democratic country, I think I have every right to express myself and I would never refrain from doing so. Secondly, I am amused to see how sensitive Mr Deepak is when it comes to accusing our Opposition Leader. It is clear, that charging her as a liar and appreciating "Bewakoof TV" crossed him so much that he has failed to see the brighter side of the picture. Be it AL or ruling BNP, all the politicians and lawmakers are liars and for us 'small brains' it is of no use to predict their behaviour. BTW, in my opinion did not play a 'dirty game' by showing the previous file photos. It just raised the curtains and flashed the real face of our politicians. From which angle is this action irrational? Don't we have a right to know what our policy makers really are?

BTW's reputation of being heavily politicised is not unknown to anyone, and I did mention that the channel otherwise had nothing of worth to view. I am surprised that Mr

Deepak is attacking me without reading my letter properly or trying to understand what I really wanted to convey. Pity that such people living abroad fail to see the smaller improvements in our nationalised channel and forcefully want to close their eyes clinging back to their own values. There is nothing wrong in supporting a particular party or politician, but to protest against facts is irrational. And Mr Deepak has nakedly done so. Sheikh Hasina has proved to be an imposter and she is not the only one in the lane. Mr Deepak has to realise that no matter how painful or unacceptable it is, "Bewakoof TV" did a brilliant job exposing her.

Nevertheless, such reactions from people like Mr Deepak is not surprising. We live in a country where the President is forced out of his office for being 'neutral' and not visiting someone's 'maazar'. What else can we expect of the people?

Aran Siddiqi
IBA, D.U

Sony's death

It has reached new heights! Now, we see the victim's parents having to go to the PM's Office to meet her it should have been the other way

round. And the very fact that our PM has to "issue instructions" to arrest the killers proves it beyond a shred of doubt that the claim "law will take its own course" is a total farce in this country.

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One of the greatest hurdles to the development of our export industry is the sorry state of Chittagong port and unfortunately no government will ever have the guts to take on the unions who really own this vital resource.

Riddle me this, Minister, what do you think is better, having the lifeline to our country in the hands of terrorists, smugglers, gangster politicians and corrupt trade unions or an American conglomerate giving a more efficient service than ever envisaged by our hapless exporters?

Dorji
Dhaka

Dhaka bus system

I've seen some comments/ views/ideas about the bus network and congestion of Dhaka city. All of them are about urban transportation. Professionally, I am a transportation engineer, so I could not keep silent on this issue.

I have some questions before I go to in details--
Do we have a travel demand model for the dwellers of Dhaka city? Like what are the popular origins and destinations for our travellers? Of which links have more traffic, when and why?

Do we know the database of Dhaka city about our people, our city and the system? Like do we know, how much does a traveller want to pay both in terms of time and money from a place to another? How much length of road do we

have? How many vehicles do we have?

How much area we should allocate for different purposes, like housing, offices, roads, and green places?

Do we think we will go forever without maintaining lanes in the roads? Most of the cases the intersections are running by half educated traffic police who do not have any knowledge about capacity or delay or congestion or right way of roads? (And it is not their fault?).

Do we think mix of non-motorised and motorised vehicles will be allowed forever?

Do we think we can solve the congestion problem without decentralisation?

When I have the answers of these basic questions, then I can express my ideas about it.

Jahid Russel
On e-mail

Notice
Tomorrow we will publish a full-page readers' response on President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury's resignation.
-- Editor