

Adamjee closure: a bold and timely decision

Quick execution will send right signals in other areas

AFTER shuffling in a haze of confusing decisions, the government has suddenly come bold with a move to close the Adamjee Jute Mills. Once a stuff of legend of Asian entrepreneurship, it had descended to one of the most loss giving industrial fiascos in the country. There had been a demand from sane quarters for its closure for long, but the decision was delayed due to political reason.

Adamjee's accumulated loss and liabilities stood at Tk 1,950 crore after 27 years of its nationalisation since 1971. This is an awesome figure but no action was taken because it had become a bastion of trade unionism and political crowd supplying. By taking this decision, the government has stood up with robust commonsense in favour of public welfare.

There will be opposition to this decision from different quarters but it's important that the government sticks to its position. The political lobby will agitate using the sacking of workers as an issue but they must recognise that this decision makes an unassailable economic sense. This is not an issue of politics. The trade unions will also react automatically but this could even be an opportunity for them to gain part of their lost credibility by taking a positive, sensible and national interest-driven position rather than simply raising slogans which are more political than workers welfare driven.

Taka 300 crore has been earmarked for a golden handshake which is good news. The government should also organise retraining so that the retrenched workers may be hired in new industries that may come up in the same zone.

Long before Adamjee became such a white elephant the beast was killed by greedy men in many layers of power who kept the facade of industrial production going for their personal gain. Ultimately the poor, the workers and the country as a whole are paying the price for that.

The government has to make amends for the past indecision on this score. It must steadfastly go ahead with the decision that goes beyond narrow political interest but ensure that the workers get a fair deal.

We commend the government for its bold decision and urge it to hold steady under all circumstances.

Good work by the police

But all of Sony's killers must be arrested and punished

THE police have arrested Togor and two others who are closely connected with the killing of Sony at the BUET. Already the most sensational death case of the year, it has overshadowed other violent deaths because it was an innocent young girl being caught in the shoot-out between two greedy groups, both belonging to the ruling party. There was concern that the killers would run free as they have in many cases but the public pressure has been overwhelming and at least one of the alleged killer group leaders, Togor has been arrested. We hope the others will soon be arrested and the process of justice distribution initiated.

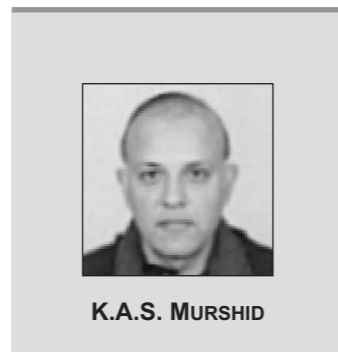
Police are saying that Mushfiquddin Togor was hiding in Kolkata but presently back in Dhaka and on his way to meet a powerful person at a local five-star hotel, the police on a tip-off caught up with him. Just as it shows that the police were vigilant in this case, it also displays the fact that the powerful were still in touch with him.

Reports also say that Togor's criminal life began through the standard process of getting a seat in the campus residential halls and doing acts to feed survival needs. As has often happened before the person becomes a criminal even without knowing. Togor was one such victim. The nature of politics that has established itself in this country needs the likes of him and everyday more of his ilk join the line, by choice or not.

If Togor is going to sound like a victim how do we describe Sony, who was battling with the difficulties of a middle class life to learn a skill and make a life? Not only have society and the State denied her proper space to construct a livelihood but also didn't even let her continue her private efforts to become educated. Other people's greed and criminalisation killed her and she is the example that unites her with our sense of helplessness.

We congratulate the police for the arrest amidst so many accusations of constant incompetence. But we shall continue to follow the case and report and make sure nothing is hidden. It's a promise to Sony, her family and friends and to ourselves, too.

The final onslaught?



K.A.S. MURSHID

IT used to be a well-ordered world, once. Order however is no longer to be taken for granted. The comfort we once derived from a belief in rules and norms has been deeply shaken, as we face a rapidly changing society trying to adjust desperately to an even more rapidly changing world order (or more appropriately perhaps, disorder). Despite the rhetoric of globalisation, the actual facts on the ground seem to indicate greater intolerance -- to other people, other religions and other cultures.

The U.S.A. and Europe are desperately trying to find ways to curb immigration, especially of people from developing countries. The incidents of September 11 will of course be fully exploited to justify restrictions imposed on foreigners. The type of restrictions being mooted suggest a scant respect for human rights and human dignity, and close to tactics one normally associates with less 'civilized' regimes. These include arrests on suspicion and without a warrant, arbitrary identity checks and invasion of privacy. In addition, of

course, legitimate travellers continue to suffer the indignation and harassment meted out by over-zealous embassy staff of certain countries, with the worst offenders apparently being those who are themselves immigrants from 'ethnic' backgrounds (or so the stories suggest).

These measures come over and above the widespread institutional discrimination suffered by

corn, wheat or whatever)?

The dual mind-set of the West is perhaps incorrigible. This is the mind-set that can sit comfortably with some of the greatest crimes ever committed on Planet Earth, including the genocide against the American Indians across the Americas and the decimation and destruction of the original Australians (the use of the word 'aboriginal' is intentionally demeaning and

crimination and prejudice, it acknowledged its existence in private but vehemently denied it in public. This had obvious advantages -- not the least of which was that you could then avoid having to DO anything about it; more importantly, you could continue to assume the high moral ground from which you could gaze disdainfully at the scores of 'uncivilised' countries that dot the map. But

what Sharon is trying to do in Palestine, his friends will not try to do on a much larger canvas? If you are willing to destroy an entire people or an entire country in search of a small number of terrorists (and even then not succeeding very well) then how unlikely is it that you would consider wiping out entire nations from the planet because you have secret evidence that some individuals in those countries

on. Ultimately there will be just one, unified world where WE will rule and our friends and partners will support us in our endeavours to promote world prosperity. They of course will not be allowed to send us illegal immigrants (and our legal set up and immigration officials will make sure that no one can come in legally!)

What should developing countries do, especially those with large Muslim populations? The instinctive response among many may well be to turn their backs on the West and everything Western. That is exactly what must be avoided at all costs. South Asian Muslims had at one time refused to adopt British education and paid the price for this for the next two hundred years. The way forward is not to deny engagement with the West but to embrace it constructively, as the Japanese have done. The trick is to remain intrinsically and fundamentally true to one's own identity while at the same time being world citizens -- again exactly as the Japanese have pulled off so well. Bangladesh is probably one of the few countries in the (Islamic) world that is best suited to blaze this particular trail. More importantly, there is no alternative but to do so. In the short-term we need to merely survive -- by perhaps agreeing to lose the battle. The war will be waged much later and at a different level, and whatever form it takes, one thing is certain: it cannot be fought militarily. And that is the war that must be won.

Dr K A S Murshid is an economist and Research Director, BIDS.

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

The trick is to remain intrinsically and fundamentally true to one's own identity while at the same time being world citizens -- exactly as the Japanese have pulled off so well. Bangladesh is probably one of the few countries in the (Islamic) world that is best suited to blaze this particular trail. More importantly, there is no alternative but to do so. In the short-term we need to merely survive -- by perhaps agreeing to lose the battle. The war will be waged much later and at a different level, and whatever form it takes, one thing is certain: it cannot be fought militarily. And that is the war that must be won.

non-white foreigners especially across Europe. One must really ask whether such an emerging climate of hostility, including the threat of punitive action against 'supplying' countries, is conducive to a global market economy. It's the same old story. It is the drug supply that is the problem and not its insatiable demand. If you cannot stop people from entering your rather well-guarded shores how do you expect poor countries to stop their citizens from leaving? If you had really believed in a better, more equitable world order wouldn't you have made your markets more accessible to developing countries (e.g. by stopping those ridiculous farm subsidies for NOT producing

should be abandoned), while at the same time spouting platitudes about the equality of Man and the trust in God! Large-scale killings were then justified on the ground that these people were not really human, and at any rate were infidels (and therefore beyond the pale).

The last fifty years saw an uncomfortable period. Even when the civilized West continued to do beastly things to minorities, ethnic populations, foreigners and blacks, they could no longer be dismissed as sub-human groups without basic rights. Deep down inside however, a true sense of equality never evolved. Thus when confronted by evidence of racial dis-

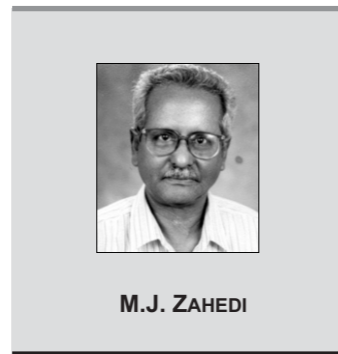
even so, there were some rules and a wide (even if somewhat reluctant) acceptance of some basic tenets. Many people in the West (individuals and groups) were beginning to get used to the notion of democracy and human rights and more willing to apply the same set of standards to those of a different hue or with dissimilar body hair! Indeed, significant gains were made in the last 100 years. All this however now appears deeply threatened.

We have already marked out the Muslims as a suspect population in Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Chechnya, Philippines etc. You can be sure that more will be similarly marked and targeted. How unlikely is it that

may be plotting to attack another tall building? The well-ordered, civilised world that we had taken for granted has ceased to exist. This reality has not yet sunk into our consciousness. The final onslaught has truly begun, and yet we are scarcely aware of it.

On the one hand, it is a war for markets and for energy sources, as we all know. More fundamentally, it is a war of domination, and for the time being the Muslims have been identified as the most immediate obstacle. Once this obstacle is removed -- through persuasion, prodding or if all fails, by physical elimination then other obstacles will be discovered, e.g. the Chinese, the Indians, the Turks and so

Of Kashmiris' fundamental and inalienable right



M.J. ZAHEDI

TENSION on the Pakistan-India border, though not completely reduced, can be said to be reducing, slowly and gradually. The next appropriate step for the two neighbours would be to start withdrawing their forces from the border and the Line of Control (LOC). They should not now talk about hypothetical victories, like the Indian prime minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has been doing. Claiming victory without going to war does indeed seem odd. If indeed there was any winner, it was good sense and restraint. But if Mr Vajpayee wants to show that he did not buckle under international pressure, then it is a different matter!

Of course, another factor was American intervention. For obvious reasons, Washington definitely did not want the two nuclear-powered neighbours to go to war. So America intervened, diplomatically of

course, and succeeded in getting both India and Pakistan to reduce the temperature and take steps to bring normality in the situation. The war, which the Indian prime minister is referring to in juxtaposition with a victory, was never a reality. There was a confrontation and there was much bandying about the term 'nuclear weapons' by both the countries. But it is doubtful if the ultimate objective was worth

clampdown on 'cross-border terrorism'. The dialogue that was expected to follow a pullback of forces is, therefore, still a long way off. This takes the situation back to where it was when a string of honest brokers visited the region calling for restraint and avoiding war.

Why the situation is not taking a turn for improvement is not difficult to understand. The Indian leaders

stands true. The confrontation had reached a point where neither of the states was in a position to pull back and be praised for it. Indian leaders' domestic compulsions specially had forced them to be bellicose to a level from where it was difficult to retract without losing face. American incremental diplomacy, with the officials gradually rising in rank to reach cabinet level, helped to satisfy India's infatuation

at a private UN Security Council discussion on Kashmir called by Mexico, and the efforts to settle it. If India is right on Kashmir, why should it fear third-party mediation or UN or other multilateral efforts to bring permanent peace to impoverished South Asia by helping India and Pakistan reach a solution acceptable to the Kashmiris? The truth is that everyone knows the truth and India does

again proved this. While confirming that 'cross LoC-infiltration has 'almost ended, he conceded in the same breath that the militants were still fighting the Indian army. But rather than taking this as a sign of the fundamental and unresolved Kashmir dispute, he blamed the 13-year-old and still continuing insurgency on Pakistan. He and his bosses in New Delhi are of course loath to acknowledge the real cause. He even would not acknowledge that the trigger to the pent-up anger of forty years was provided not by Pakistan but an election in occupied Kashmir more blatantly rigged than all the previous ones.

Now, after thirteen years of strife, New Delhi wishes to start from where it had left off -- that is by holding another election under the heels of the Indian army, install another pliable government and declare to the world that the problem stands resolved. But this has not worked in the past and there is no reason to believe that it will do so now. India will ultimately have to face reality and give the Kashmiris their right of self-determination. That is the only thing that Pakistan has ever asked for. And, more importantly, that is India's commitment to the Kashmiris and the world. This commitment surely does not come under the statute of limitation. It is the Kashmiris' fundamental and inalienable right.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the Khaleez Times.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

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fighting a full-fledged war with nuclear weapons. The calculus of the outcome did not favour such an option for either of the two neighbours.

But what is worrying observers now is that instead of proceeding to step two to further reduce tension, India is following a go-slow policy. None of the expected withdrawal of forces from the border has taken place so far; it has caused the de-escalation process to reach a virtual dead-end. Even EU leaders on Friday asked India to take 'further de-escalatory steps' in response to Pakistan's

apparently are afraid of being seen as having succumbed to pressure to end the stand off. Even prime minister Vajpayee went to great pains to play down such an impression and in the process saw Pakistan as making the moves to assuage Indian fears. Even the Americans and a host of other nations, which had joined the parade of mediators, were denied their rightful credit in helping to diminish the threat of conflict.

But, however much as the Indian or Pakistani leaders would not like to be seen as wiling under US pressure, the reality sadly

(as one local English daily put it) for being treated as a major power with a nuclear profile, 'albeit a penurious one).

The problem with New Delhi is that despite having internationalised the Kashmir dispute by screaming terrorism and massing troops on Pakistan's border, India remains too insecure internally to move towards an equitable solution of the issue. Its fears are palpable in shying away from international mediation, despite using it profusely to defuse the border tension. How ridiculous this fear makes India look is evident from its

not like it. When a party has no case and the situation on the ground is not palatable, reliance is usually placed on stridency and rhetoric rather than on reasoned, consistent and coherent arguments. That has been and remains India's dilemma, on Kashmir. Its standard escape route is to blame everything on Pakistan while, simultaneously, frustrating all attempts to find a peaceful solution to South Asia's sore. India's defence minister, the voluble George Fernandes who only carried forward this tradition in occupied Kashmir, has once

OPINION

The Presidency in turmoil: When will it get institutionalised?

NURUL ISLAM ANU

THE presidency is in the news again - and this time with more of theatrics and drama than ever before. A newly elected President, product of a partisan choice asked to resign and threatened with impeachment by the same party of which he was the founder Secretary-General, asked to resign on intensely partisan grounds not remotely connected with the discharge of his responsibilities under the Constitution which he swore to protect and defend.

The President apparently sinned by being absent at the Mazar of the party founder and by the more unforgivable omission to characterise the party founder as "Shadhinar Ghosak". These are rituals that Professor Choudhury performed with monotonous regularity and perhaps with a considerable amount of dedication during his entire political career. Arrogance of power -- dictatorial or parliamentary -- leads to an obsessive propensity to its irrational or insane use. Since a product of expedient impulse -- it is short sighted and counter-productive. In the present case both an individual and a sacred institution has been a victim of this process.

The present controversy dramatically highlights the regrettable failure of the political establishment to conceptualise the role of the

Presidency as a constitutional institution under a parliamentary democracy. And the rather chequered and colourful evolution of the Presidency from 1971 to the present day only testifies to that. Fundamentally the confused and inconsistent evolution of the Presidency was the result of a conflict between the deeply held democratic aspirations of the nation and the sporadic authoritarian adventurism by a certain political persuasion at a given part of our political history. Clearly the ideals of the liberation war -- with the memory of Pakistani experience haunting us --

envisaged the noble goal of establishing a democratic society -- the easily comprehensible Parliamentary one -- with the President being a constitutional head. But then again the President being the repository of the "Executive Authority of the Republic" and the symbol of the "Nationhood" threw a challenge to our political ingenuity to create and evolve an institution creatively. Core to this challenge was an understanding that an institution that symbolise the finest values of "Nationhood" cannot be partisan. The office therefore required high level of commitment to moral integrity, deep regard for the constitutional process and neutrality. These are clear and unmistakable moral demands on the incumbent of the office. It is therefore critical that a political

party nominating a President under a parliamentary democracy is clearly aware of this invariable characteristics of this office.

A partisan demand on the conduct of the Presidency is simply inconsistent with the philosophical and moral content of that office in a parliamentary democracy. As a symbol of the sovereignty of the republic and upholder of the constitution he cannot discriminate in the sacred task of preserving, protecting and defending the Constitution. He cannot be part of a partisan manipulative process because the Constitution simply does not allow him that discretion. The party nominating the President must be morally prepared to allow the Presidency that freedom -- unbridled partisan indulgence to manipulate in favour of particular political persuasion is just not acceptable. These are inescapable demands of the constitution on the conduct of the presidency.

In the selection of late Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman demonstrated a clear and conceptual realisation of the office. He tried and actively encouraged that the Presidency grows as an impartial and

Constitutional institution. He directed cabinet ministers to conform the constitutional requirement to keep the President informed on the affairs of their ministries. He

himself scrupulously met the president to keep him informed

of the condition of the "Republic". This was a subtle process, quietly taking a shape and the dominant personality of Bangabandhu only made it less visible. The writer of this column having served both the President and the Prime Minister was a witness to this process.

And then from 1974 onwards the Presidency went through a bizarre evolution. The introduction of Baksal as a political experiment and subsequent military incursions made qualitative changes in the definition of the Presidency.

This confused evolution was again a manifestation of the inherent problem: Conflict between the inherent democratic aspiration of the people an accountable democratic order within a pluralistic society -- and a propensity for authoritarian indulgence. A conflict between fundamental belief and expedient politics is bound to be degenerative and counter productive to institution building. This period of our national history -- a ruthless victim of military adventurism showed little respect to Institution building -- the Presidency being no exception.

So the Presidency experiences a shady and inconsistent evolution -- victim of successive constitutional amendments suiting the

baser political need of the ruler indifferent to the fundamentals dictates of Bangladesh history. The sovereign -- the common man -- remains as confused as ever.

The fall of General Ershad as a military dictator and the reemergence of a national consensus for the establishment of Parliamentary democracy revived the need for a redefinition of the Presidency. In 1991 President Shahabuddin Ahmed made a personal contribution in highlighting certain attributes of the Presidency by demonstrating an exemplary level of political neutrality, a moral commitment to the constitutional process and a high degree of personal integrity.

Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in choosing Justice Shahabuddin, a non-Awami League, made a commendable beginning in making the constitutional and non-partisan institution. In an atmosphere of obsessive partisan political culture this was refreshing bold move widely acclaimed by the nation. Despite periodic temptations she showed remarkable restraint in sparing the presidency of any partisan assault. Then came the controversy surrounding the election of 2001 which again brought back to focus the basic problem -- this time Presidential neutrality coming to the centre of the controversy.

Prime Minister Begum Zia and

BNP made a conscious partisan choice in nominating Prof. Choudhury, an eminent member of the party. One could argue whether the Prime Minister should have followed Sheikh Hasina's example.

Crude reality of partisan politics and Awami Leagues experience with Justice Shahabuddin was too demanding to overcome. But the present unexpected assault Begum Zia has chosen to make on the institution of the Presidency again brings us back to the FUNDAMENTALS:

- Should the Presidency be allowed to grow as an independent, impartial institution with an unshakable commitment to the Constitutional process? If that be so, should not the political establishment demonstrate a conscious commitment to that ideal?
 - If the President symbolises the totality of the "Nationhood" and as a conscious keeper of the nation should he be allowed the constitutional freedom to inculcate that?
 - Can the above objectives be achieved and the Presidency institutionalised with the political establishment remaining insensitive to basic non-partisan character of the office?
- The present crisis has brought these issues once again to the surface and need for a national debate looks imperative. Political

leadership requires a sincere and honest realisation of the issues highlighted above. A healthy presidency will support, and complement the democratic evolution: these are inescapable realities and can only be ignored at the cost of political poverty the nation does not deserve. In neighbouring India, the choice of Dr. Radhakrishnan, Dr. Zakir Hossain and latest Dr Abdul Kalam is example where successive non-partisan incumbents strengthened the office without being threat to partisan interest.

Prof. Choudhury was an intensely partisan personality throughout his political career. His pursuit of BNP's partisan interest has often been ruthless or some say even crude. Dr Choudhury hails from my district Munshiganj and I had personal association with him stretching back 35 years. I am a political witness to his intense partisanship and his love for his own party. If Prof. Choudhury sinned in not visiting the mazar of the party chief as President, a ritual he has religiously performed as a party functionary, then a controversy regarding Prof. Choudhury's delinquency in discharging certain quality of party loyalty is essentially an organisational issue which should not have been dragged to the sacred arena of the Presidency. A discreet mature handling at the party level was the obvious saner course to follow. After taking oath as President he visited the mazar of General Zia but regrettably

failed to show respect to Bangabandhu by a similar visit. If Bangabandhu represents the most glorious part of our nationhood, a President of Bangladesh failing to show respect to the Father on the Nation was a serious regrettable omission. But there was no demand for resignation or impeachment from Awami League.

Here in this case an unfortunate precedent has been established in requiring a President to resign for partisan consideration. It is unfortunate and short sighted. It has not served the cause of democracy or the critical need of an institutionalised Presidency -- a Presidency committed to the highest degree of constitutional neutrality, a Presidency that breathes and sustains the finest values

of the Nationhood and the Republic. In succumbing the office to the demand of expedient politics, the Prime Minister and BNP did a disservice to the country, its healthy democratic evolution. She and her party did not serve the Constitution.

Let us hope that the triumph of expedient politics is only temporary.

Nurul Islam Anu is a former civil servant & former president, Awami League USA Unit.