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MP's arrest smacks of political victimisation

After all he submitted himself to legal process in good faith

HE chronology of facts and circumstances leading up to the arrest of opposition AL MP Shawqat Ali speak for themselves. In other words, an impression gets inescapably formed, much that one might try to shake it off -out of respect for judiciary that some kind of a politicoexecutive hang-up got the better of best judgement there. On the basis of available facts, the arrest may lends itself to an interpretation that Shawqat Ali has been politically victimised. There is no gainsaying the fact that we are holding this view without being judgmental on the culpability or otherwise of Shawqat Ali MP in the case which is for the court to decide in the ultimate analysis.

Here is the tell-tale sequence of events proximate to the arrest. On the directive of High Court Division, which had granted him anticipatory bail until July 23, the MP appears before the local magistrate court with a prayer for bail. His petition is rejected, he is arrested on warrant and sent to jail. All of this after he has shown respect for a judicial directive and subjected himself to the legal process in good faith. Notably, in presenting himself before the magistrate's court he did not even wait until July 23 which he could have within the meaning of the High Court directive. He is an elected MP very much in the limelight with the parliament session on. He is a politician of standing and repute who was not supposed to make himself unavailable to court summons whenever

The magistrate has acted in his best wisdom, but without any prejudice to the case we feel duty-bound to underline the sensitivity about the lower judiciary being under the control of the executive.

It is also essential to point out by way of putting things in perspective that there were two cases filed on the murder of Delwar Hossain in a clash between supporters of Shawgat Ali and those of an independent candidate who contested the former in the last general election. But obviously the case in which Shawgat Ali was implicated has been taken up while the other one got lost in the wilderness. The slant hardly escapes notice. Isn't it?

Why fiddle with Viqarunnisa?

It's a threat to good school education

NE of the few schools in Dhaka that has gained a tradition of excellence is Vigarunnisa. In the last five decades it has emerged as one of the most sterling examples of providing school education successfully and its reputation goes beyond the borders. However, there is concern that the hands of party politics and power grabbing are at play now and the present Principal Prof. Hamida Ali may be replaced by another more friendly to the political party.

It appears that a move is on to hand over the job to a more politically pliable person.

Hamida Ali's contract has run out and although an extension was favoured by the school management body and the local MP, and was sent to the Chairman of the School Education Board Md. Junayad for approval, he has refused to endorse it. Hence the crisis.

Media reports that the guardians and students support the popular Hamida Ali and many have become disconcerted at the thought that the person who has led the school to its present stage in the last 19 years may be gone and an appointment based on cronyism will replace it. Neither the teachers nor the guardians want this to happen and have said so to the press.

It takes years to build a school. But it takes very little time to destroy a reputation and demolish the structure of an institution. In this case the course seems to be that of patronage before education. Yet curiously enough the crisis seems to have started because many leaders wanted their child admitted to the school but failed to do so. This irked them so much that they decided to have a more pliable person at the helms so that their wards could get easy entry.

Politics has managed to destroy almost every sector of public education in Bangladesh. Fortunately, some schools had managed to avert this because many children of the powerful study in local schools still and they have a stake in the system. But maybe that is over, given the diminishing immunity of even good schools to such a pernicious strangling trend.

For the sake of children let's not tinker with what is functioning well. Children deserve something better than this politics.

The crassness of our political class



HE overwhelming electoral mandate for a Bangladesh -free from terror and corruption -- is evidently abused by BNPled four party coalition government as the country reaches the end of its tether with further collapse of law and order and escalation of terror. With Awami League, the main opposition discredited and humiliated in last general election the government however faces no challenge from any quarter for its abject failure in providing any better safety and security to the citizens. Most of the coalition's enterprises and talents are exhausted in Awamibashing and little is left to deal with the hard issues of the polity like curbing terrorism, extortion, murder and plethora of other crimes gripping the society. Yet, the coalition thinks that the situation would have been hunky-dory but for the Awami League's perfidy. On the other hand the opposition Awami League which is now reaping the whirlwind after its ignominious defeat in October last doesn't seem to have learnt a single lesson and the party keeps blowing politics with the fond hope of returning again to power. The pattern has gone unchanged during the democracy's roller coaster ride in Bangladesh through last two decades. The political parties continue to tread, in their naivity, the same beaten track.

Even as the country goes through the spasm of deepening crises, strangely the perks and

development, the problem of nationbuilding and so on -- remaining indefinitely unaddressed. The stagnation that follows provides a field day to the self-serving politicians with their greedy fingers stuck in the ever-shrinking national pie. As a spectre of uncertainty, anxiety and fear stalk the country the crimes flourish, vices spread like infection and corruption takes its root deeper

imperious conduct of the ruling coalition negates many of the norms of democracy which seems to have become orphan with an inconsistent opposition and inarticulate civil

The restoration of democracy from the clutches of long autocratic rule in 1990 had been a great political development for this country. It taka to be paid annually as subsidy for AJM why it did not show the same anxiety for the recovery of 24,000 crore taka of defaulted bank loan for years?

Several crucial developments are taking place in the country when the important decision making has been quietly shifted to the Prime Minister's Office or at the best the cabinet is making a mockery of the

uents' party and individual interests are taken care of. The opposition whose hands are stained earlier has little moral authority to register protest and the observation made by it is often reduced to platitude.

There is, of course, no instant cure for the malady. It is, however, clear that unless we can rid our politics of the present self-serving lot more calamities will overtake the polity till it succumbs to an evil force -- hitherto unthought of. The European democracies between the two great wars fell to such forces for their long neglect of the parliament. There is indeed no room for complacency only with a label of democracy unless we make it functional by fostering first a democratic culture through respect, love and compassion for each other and their points of view. Democracy is a way of life and it can be embraced only with large heartedness and certainly not through letting each other down -the only trait we have acquired in our parliamentary conduct

We have a great potential for democracy and the history is a pointer to it. Let us not lose it through neglect, mutual bickering and diabolical greed for power and riches. We know what it is only when it is no more there. The late President of Pakistan, Zulfigar Ali Bhutto often ridiculed India's democracy as a big chaos. He however developed tremendous nostalgia for this chaos before being marched to the gal-

PERSPECTIVES

There is indeed no room for complacency only with a label of democracy unless we make it functional by fostering first a democratic culture through respect, love and compassion for each other and their points of view. Democracy is a way of life and it can be embraced only with large heartedness and certainly not through letting each other down -- the only trait we have acquired in our parliamentary conduct.

privileges of the MPs and ministers are the staple of the political discourse and parliamentary debate while mutual mud-slinging is the favourite pastime of the politicians. The floor of the parliament is dominated by abuse and counter abuses which the honourable members have so far excelled in. The language and vocabulary used by both the leaders of the House and Opposition are pungent, offending and outrageous making it impossible for the democratic space to extend. The conciliation, tolerance and mutual respect are simply not in their chemistry. While they remain locked in perpetual quarrel the nation bleeds with its problems --

the problem of internal disorder, the

Where do we go from here?

Once we hoped against hope that with the passage of time the nation would mature and some enlightened leadership committed to the national interests would emerge to replace the moribund one awaiting its extinction or some metamorphosis would take place in its outlook. Or even a traditional leadership with roots among the masses would come up the classical leadership leader -- something the country was used to in the past. But dashing those hopes the trends are already set to produce leaders front the laboratory of party caucus or political dynasty. In a wider context the trend has brought us face to face with new crisis for democratic

gave confidence to the people of their democratic talent. But it soon aberrated in the hands of inept political leaders who have brought the nation to its present pass when the country's constitution is denigrated in removing its President. The country's biggest industrial unit is closed down without a reference of it to the parliament in a dispensation identified under the rubric of parliamentary democracy. The nation is far from convinced of the reason given by the authority with regards to the closure of AJM (Adamii Jute Mills). If the government was worried about the public money amounting to 1200 crore

sparked new hopes, showed path to

the nation groping for direction and

the autocratic tendencies in the government. Yet while this practice is already is voque, curiously the same sense of urgency is seldom shown in combating either the terrorism or corruption -- the twin menace for the country. Ironically, the dragging of the feet, and lack of prioritisation are what mark the government's perfunctory approach in this regard. As a result terrorism rages as before and corruption spreads with its roots firmly

implanted. The ruling coalition

couldn't care less, so long its constit-

thinking of finding a new president

parliament which is bypassed or

ignored in the name of expedition. It

is going to inexorably erode the

spirit of the parliamentary democ-

racy in this country and encourage

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Eligibility bar



M.J. ZAHEDI

WO recent decisions of the Pakistan government seem to have thrown a shadow over the coming restoration of democracy. One of the decisions bans anyone with more than two terms as prime minister of the country or chief minister of a province from holding either office ever again. The other is a ban on nongraduates from contesting national or provincial assembly elections. The former will affect even ex-PMs or CMs who might not have completed the full term of office.

Daily 'Dawn' thinks that the twoterm order will only add to the misgivings about the government's intentions. The parties that have strongly reacted to this order are the PPP and the PML(N), which virtually monopolised electoral support during the last four elections, and their leaders became prime minister twice, although neither completed any of the terms

Each time they were either dismissed by the indirectly elected Presidents or were made to resign, although they had reached their offices through the democratic process. Both parties contend that

the law is specifically directed against their leaders, a contention supported by 'Dawn'. The paper said that 'the law appears designed less as a constitutional safeguard against over-ambitious politicians monopolising power at the federal or provincial level, and more as a vindictive action against two leading party heads'. Daily 'The Nation' called the provision unprecedented and also that it

degree-holders but because there was lack of decorum in both houses and the members, both present and absent, included non-graduates and graduates. Even politicians who underwent corruption cases and even those who were convicted were both graduates and nongraduates. It is unlikely that filing a parliament with graduates and above will take it as close as possible to those in other democratic

elections. Prominent among them are former NA Speaker Gohar Avub Khan, the deputy chairman of the Senate and several other MNAs

and Senators 'Dawn' published list of MNAs and Senators who are likely to be hit by condition of educational qualification: they number about 82 MNAs and 20 Senators. In an editorial, 'Dawn' called the graduation degree

requirement a senseless eligibility

as Nawaz Sharif cannot lead the party any more. Syed Zafar Ali Shah, a central leader of the party, thinks that Nawaz's younger brother Shahbaz Sharif might replace the elder brother as he was fully qualified to lead it. Top party leaders have already started to look for a person to head the party at this difficult juncture. Not only Nawaz Sharif, several other leaders of the party including its general secretary as

Dawn has come out very clearly against the latest law. It said there is already provision in the constitution to bar election of convicts to parliament. In view of this a separate law specifically debarring someone from holding a pm's or cm's office was wholly unnecessary. Whether a person should be a prime minister once or ten times is for the people of Pakistan to decide. The paper named Margaret Thatcher, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Mahathir Mohammad, Suleman Demirel and Lee Kwan Yew as some political leaders who have held the prime minister's office in their respective countries more than

Regrettably, the Generals have ended up annoying virtually all political parties, the 'Dawn' editorial said. The Afghan crisis and the USled world coalition have alienated the religious parties. The overall effect of the latest decree (BA degree is essential) and the one on political parties promulgated in the earlier week will be highly negative, 'Dawn' editorial said. These laws and regulations are being taken recourse of to ensure a pliant parliament and prime minister. The purpose of bringing more and more educated people into parliament and the assemblies would be served better by other means. The paper said, any law that snatches away the right to contest election from 98 per cent of the population cannot possibly be a good law. It is voters alone, and not arbitrary laws, that should decide who is best

qualified to represent them in parlia-

LETTER FROM KARACH

These laws and regulations are being taken recourse of to ensure a pliant parliament and prime minister... any law that snatches away the right to contest election from 98 per cent of the population cannot possibly be a good law. It is voters alone, and not arbitrary laws, that should decide who is best qualified to represent them in parliament and other legislatures.

threatensthe parliamentary or federal character of the constitution. 'The News' said the bar amounted to a double jeopardy for people whose right to education was never met, they have lost another right because of the government's earlier failure. While in theory the ban seemed an ideal lancet to induct learned leaders, it made little sense because of distressing ground realities.

The issue basically is not looking for college-educated leaders but people with the right qualities of leadership. There is no empirical evidence that politicians equipped with a university degree make better parliamentarians than those without. Past parliaments of the country suffered not because there were members in them who were not

In the defunct parliament, 79

MNAs and 22 Senators including Benazir Bhutto did not possess a bachelor's degree, a threshold of qualification for contesting October elections. The Supreme Court has upheld the threshold. Of course there are conflicting claims on whether Benazir has a qualification equivalent to a bachelor's degree. She is listed in a list prepared by the government about educational qualification of former MNAs as educated at Radcliffe Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. She completed Oxford's diploma course in international law and diplomacy in 1977. The list showed that 79 MNAs including 533 ex-MNAs of PML(N) would not qualify for filing nomination papers to contest the October

bar. It said the relevant law is misconceived and therefor 'highly controversial', posing a question mark over the future of a large number of veteran politicians as well as aspiring newcomers. This is too sweeping a move and violates one of the tenets of parliamentary democracy

Naturally it has created a serious problem for the political parties as now they will have to bring new leaders against many offices and review the provisional list of their candidates. The Supreme Court's verdict will result in the rolling of many heads in the parties' set up. It would not be easy for any political party to find graduates both for candidates to fill assembly seats as well as to fill party offices

For example, the PML-N is now

control of the party will remain with the deposed prime minister, though ndirectly. The PPP also is faced with the same problem. Benazir's presidentship is already a matter of question, several other leaders also are faced with the same fate. Similarly, the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy also faces an uncertain future. According to experts. Nawabzada Nasrullah

also the party's Punjab president

also have to go. What however

seems certain is that the effective

Khan will be disqualified in case a decision is taken to convert it into an electoral alliance. PML(QA) has also been adversely affected by the new law. Gohar Ayub Khan has already resigned as the party's central secretary general as he is not a graduate. Some other leaders may also stand disqualified. 910

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ment and other legislatures.

OPINION

In the recent past as many as four committees had been formed to look into the affairs of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs along with other ministries and they recommended suggestions for improvement. The

committees were Brigadier Enam Committee, Mustafizur Rahman Committee, Rashid Committee and

Morshed Khan Committee... No attention was given to improve the quality of working force and structure

of the Foreign Ministry. There is a need to induct best talents in the foreign office and provide them with

Reform programme must for Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

OREIGN office as a matter of fact receives very often attention of the critics for obvious reasons as many feel foreign service officials enjoy luxurious life abroad and supposedly consider themselves as exotic to an extent while residing at home. As a vital institution of the country it needs proper attention of the government for carrying out reform programmes to make the ministry dynamic in the conduct of foreign relations. To make policy planning effective officers working in the ministry need analytical feed back from Bangladesh embassies abroad and the research wing of the ministry on the events around the world which may have bearing on Bangladesh in particular. Unfortunately research wing does not exist in the ministry although organogram of the ministry speaks of the existence for such a wing. In spite of the fact that fast developing satellite communication helped quality of news analysis and background information 24 hours a day, the political reports by diplomats indicating clear picture of the situations based on conversations with policy makers and researchers would remain valuable materials for policy planners at home because most

background information or news analysis coming from different foreign sources are invariably slanted to meet the needs of their

Therefore, there is hardly any need to emphasise on the importance of research wing in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The library equally plays an important role in disseminating background information on important matters if it is equipped with reference books. world almanac, Kissing archives, who's who, important journals etc. Possibly the present generation officers are not acquainted with Kissing archive, as this important reference journal has not been on the list of subscription for a considerable period. The library of the foreign office is in bad shape particularly in the absence of a professional librarian, which post remains vacant for a long period. The same is the case with the vitally important wing of the ministry i.e. External Publicity Wing. It may be noted that external publicity is an adjunct of foreign policy. This wing is presently manned by officers of the Ministry of Information who have little experience of working in the political desks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Either these officers should be

integrated with the foreign office or should be sent back to their parent ministry. Similarly press posts in Bangladesh embassies remain under the administrative control of the Ministry of Information while the External Publicity Wing has been reverted back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, dual administration over the external

had fallen vacant following the retirement of the last legal advisor. As a stop gap arrangement a retired Foreign Secretary held the post for quite some time but his emoluments could not be decided upon as the status of the post is at the level of additional secretary. The posts of deputy legal advisor and director (technical) have never been filled in

aries. The officer, who also has qualification in law, should fill in the post of senior assistant secretary in the legal wing

Manpower in the ministry is not enough to cope with developments in different fields around the world. In the ministry one officer has been assigned to look after the work of two posts. Therefore, no one can

groom the budding diplomats are declining as the administration refuses to accept fellowships on the plea of shortage of manpower. In this connection, it would be appropriate to mention one such case when the administration of foreign office had accepted one fellowship out of two offered by Berlin based German Diplomatic Institute, Atten-

Grade as Principal and Vice-Principal to pay unhindered attention to the development of curricula and training method. The academy does not have planned training programmes. Apart from theoretical programmes probationer officers should be imparted simulation and stress management programmes. In the simulation programmes the issue of conflict around the world, UN Security Council's role and activities of other international fora where negotiation skills play important part should be included. The programme seems to be rewarding for the budding diplomats from the experiences I gathered in the simulation programme (introduced by me) for the officers of 1992 batches. Wives of the foreign service officers may also be given a course in the academy about etiquette, table planning and preparation of Bangladesh cuisine as well. To make the diplomats more effective and perfor-

In view of the present condition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reform programmes would be

cers of the rank of Ambassador A required to restructure the ministry in order to induce energetic and intelligent young officers to make the ministry dynamic and performance-oriented. In the recent past as many as four committees had been formed to look into the affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with other ministries and they recommended suggestions for improvement. The committees were Brigadier Enam Committee, Mustafizur Rahman Committee, Rashid Committee and Morshed Khan Committee. None of them had experience of working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. No attention was given to improve the quality of working force and structure of the Foreign Ministry. There is a need to induct best talents in the foreign office and provide them with the required professional training at home and abroad. In thirty years four reports on the reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been submitted, but all the reports mance oriented there is a need to might have been kept in the cold increase knowledge and foreign storage. At least the reports of allowances, which are negligible Morshed Khan Committee should compared to those of even neighbe dug out from there and appropriate actions initiated to make the ministry dynamic and effective.

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publicity set-up defeats the purpose of the wing itself. The important publication of the external publicity viz., Bangladesh Documents, which serves as very useful reference, has ceased with the departure of a political party from power. This turns out to be a silly game. This publication should be continued under any circumstance for the interest of the

Another vital wing is the legal wing, which has remained almost ineffective. The post of legal advisor

the past. Recently the post of deputy legal advisor was filled in by an officer from administrative service who has legal background. The posts of legal advisor and deputy legal advisor should he filled in by selecting from among professional leading lawyers, who have background in international law as well as knowledge about law of the sea. The legal wing of the Ministry of

the required professional training at home and abroad.

Foreign Affairs plays very significant role in vetting agreements/ memorandum of understanding, apart from delimitation of maritime bound-

expect good performance in the given circumstance. Recruitment policy needs to be changed for Foreign Service cadre. The objective should be to build a work force that reflects the excellence and high professional standard. Preference should be given to such young man or woman, who knows more than one foreign language besides English. The intake capacity for the ministry should be at least doubled from the present strength, which

Training facilities abroad to

stands at 16 only.

Foreign Service Academy, which has also been reverted back to the fold of the ministry. In 1985 it was unfortunately merged with BCS (Administration) Academy. The importance of proper and adequate training, both theoretical and practical, can hardly be overemphasized. Since the foreign service officers

tion of the administration is drawn to

the academic atmosphere of the

consider posting at the Academy as punishment the ministry may consider appointing on contract basis retired senior foreign service offi-

bouring countries.