

Attack on Humayun Azad

Intellectual freedom at stake

PROFESSOR Humayun Azad is fighting for his life, after having taken repeated strokes from a butcher's knife. Words are not enough to describe the bestiality that went into the attempt to kill a prominent intellectual of our country.

The assailants, who have committed a dastardly crime, are yet to be identified. But it is not difficult to guess who they could be. Obviously, ordinary criminals could not have any stake in liquidating an intellectual known for his very original views. The attack, one is forced to conclude, can be traced to some ideological origin. And there is no doubt that political intolerance, which we witness these days with much trepidation, was the driving force behind it. The victim might have exposed himself to the fury of obscurantism or fanaticism through his write-ups. Unfortunately, there was none to alert him to the impending danger. The life of an intellectual appears to be a trifling thing that nobody cares about.

Intellectuals have been intimidated, harassed or even jailed. But this attack is unprecedented, which can only bring disgrace to the law enforcement system as a whole. What can we expect from it when the life of a peace-loving teacher is not safe?

The home ministry has reacted the way it was expected to. There is assurance that the culprits will be brought to justice. The sad truth, however, is that very few of them have been brought to justice in recent times, despite the unusual surge in criminal activities. We hope the law enforcers will succeed this time around, but the nation must not lose sight of some glaring truths which have a great bearing on such criminal activities. There is an ever growing intolerance and tendency to deny the intellectuals the space that they need to bring their creative ideas into full play. Professor Azad might have been looking for that space all his life and what a price he has been made to pay for being a free thinker!

It has been an attack on not only an individual but also the whole enterprise of intellectual freedom. The attack should be a wake-up call to the truth that obscurantism has cast its ominous shadow on society and also that intellectual freedom is its first target.

Proshika funds unfrozen

Let's not punish the most needy

WE welcome the decision taken by the government to finally release the funds that it had frozen pending the investigation into Proshika's alleged financial irregularities. We have long argued in these pages that the freezing of Proshika's funds before the investigation is tantamount to imposing a punishment before the verdict has been handed down.

The injudiciousness of the government order freezing the funds was compounded by the fact that the principal victims of this punishment that was imposed was not the NGO itself or its president Qazi Faruque Ahmed, but those who are served by Proshika's programmes.

Proshika's programmes directly benefit hundreds of thousands of the rural poor, the most marginalised and needy segment of society, that the government itself has done little to serve. In its zeal to prosecute Proshika, the government forgot about them, and has thus been guilty of punishing the poor for Proshika's alleged misdeeds for the past two years.

Now that the government has taken the welcome step of agreeing to release the frozen funds, the next step would be to release to the public the government audit report it has commissioned.

The report has been released to the donors who have criticised it for being politicised and inconclusive, and suggest that an independent international auditor be appointed to reinvestigate the allegations.

NGO Bureau Director General Shahjahan Majumdar says that the investigation into Proshika and the other NGOs under scrutiny found 55 types of irregularities involving Tk 100 crore, but Qazi Faruque says that the report includes no mention of legal violation or misuse of funds by Proshika.

The public needs to know the truth of the matter so that it is able to judge for itself the rights and the wrongs, and the only way to accomplish this is to release the report to the public. If the government is acting in the public interest, as it claims, then it has an obligation to share the facts with the public.

In addition, the government should also release the funds that it has frozen from the other three NGOs that are under investigation. Like Proshika, they should also be permitted to continue their work while investigations into their alleged misdeeds are pending. The only real consequence of freezing such funds is to deprive the people who receive their services of much-needed assistance.

Has the quartet roadmap been consigned to oblivion?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

In the almost obsessive global attention centered on Iraq and the war on terror the Middle East crisis appears to be getting far lesser attention than what it deserves. President Bush and his aides are concordant in their schismatic efforts to bring peace in post-Saddam Iraq, to restore to the Iraqis some semblance of sovereignty, and at the same time to retain mainly US military presence in Iraq at least for the foreseeable future. That all these actions may not necessarily lead to a common goal have eluded the proponents of these strategies. The daily body count of the coalition forces and of the Iraqis collaborating with the Americans belies any credible claim to the attainment of peace in Iraq. The interim Iraqi Governing Council can hardly be called sovereign even if the concept of sovereignty is amputated to Lilliputian size. Besides, even if Ayatollah al-Sistani's valid insistence of one man-one vote election to a constituent assembly is adhered to, it is not apparent that such an election would necessarily usher in "democratic moment" in Iraq and have a domino effect as had happened in the former East Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Albeit the history of the Middle East and East Europe are different, yet the choral public utterances of the Western leaders on such do not seem to strike a familiar chord in the western world.

To historian Bernard Lewis the struggle between the Muslim world and the Christian Europe from the first Arab incursions in the eighth century to the final Turkish retreat in the twentieth century was referred to by the Muslims not in territorial or national terms but simply as war against the infidels. Therefore, writes Bernard Lewis, the American President is the successor of a long line of rulers -- the Byzantine emperors of Constantinople, the Holy Roman emperors of Vienna, Queen Victoria and her imperial colleagues and successors in Europe -- all of whom represented the "land of the unbelievers". (The Crisis of Islam2003). If this struggle is still continuing then we are in conflict with Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" concept which posits that liberal democracy may constitute the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of government" and as such constitute

the "end of history".

This is so because the openness of the evolution of mankind, believed by both Hegel and Marx, had reached its final destination after experiencing the enormous weaknesses of the world's seemingly strong dictatorships of the Right and the communist totalitarianism of the Left. This belief is further strengthened by Samuel Huntington's thesis that conflict along the fault line between western and Islamic civilisations have been going on for thirteen hundred years and that this century's old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline and could become more virulent. Huntington appears to agree with Bernard Lewis that the West is "facing a need and a move-

therefore not totally surprised when questions are being raised as to whether Iraq can be democratic, let alone a democratic domino in the Arab world.

It would however be unfair to question the intentions of the western analysts if they indeed raise doubts about the possibility and viability of democratic movements in the Muslim world. US based Freedom House estimates that a non-Islamic country is three times more likely than an Islamic country to be democratic. When Samuel Huntington was tracing the third wave of democratisation in the late twentieth century (the first wave took place after the First World War and the second wave occurred during the post-Second World War decolonisation period) the Middle

governance of the country and also in the field of secular intellectual development.

It is also being argued that most of the Islamic countries do not possess domestic conditions that set the stage for democratic change elsewhere. In other words the Muslim countries do not have previous experience with democracy. Besides the Middle Eastern Muslim states do not have positive "neighbourhood effects" as the neighbouring countries are already adorned with authoritarian rules. Democratic experience argument appears to be rather weak if one considers the transition from military dictatorships to democratic rule in many countries of Latin America who for decades had seen nothing but ruthless dictatorships in their own countries.

stimulates higher levels of democratic values in the political culture of a people. Researchers have also found that no democratic country with per capita income of eight thousand dollars suffer loss of democracy. The argument is that higher standard of living breeds cultural values that demand democracy. It would however be prudential to note that the reverse is not necessarily true nor that a democratic country has to have high per capita income. India and some other countries that have practiced democracy for decades are still regarded as developing countries and do not fall into the category of rich countries. But then again in the cases of Taiwan and South Korea, accelerated economic growth engineered by command econ-

plan to democratise the Arab world without tackling the core issues that have tormented the region for decades. They also declared that the Western model of democracy may not necessarily fit a region largely driven by Islamic teachings. The joint statement runs counter to Colin Powell's announcement earlier this month of a major international initiative aimed at encouraging democratisation of greater Middle East and to find ways to institutionalise the reforms.

Since a solution of the Palestine problem is central to any exercise relating to peace in this area last October's Geneva accord, rejected by Israel and not formally approved by the Palestinian Authority, deserves international attention. Essentially a repackaging of Clinton's 2000 peace plan, the Geneva Accord is the most far reaching draft document agreed upon by Israeli and Palestinian mainstream politicians. But if the Ariel Sharon government is bent upon finding a solution of the Israeli dilemma faced after 1967 war of how to control the land and resources of the occupied area without taking responsibility for the people living in it the Road Map/Geneva Accord would meet the same fate as that of Alton Plan, Sharon Plan, World Jewish Congress Plan, Menachem Begin Plan, Oslo Accord etc. The interests of the modern day Prometheus would be best served not by opposing the ICJ on the case of Israeli Berlin Wall but by finding a fair solution of the Palestinian problem.

The world has not become so amnesiac as to totally forget the political obfuscation of the Balfour Declaration, Winston Churchill's 1922 assurance given on behalf of the British government that it did not contemplate the disappearance or subordination of Arab people, language or culture in Palestine. Though lot of water has passed under the bridge since then yet a conscientious world would expect some degree of fairness from the author of the doctrine of pre-emption and to prove that the men from Mars (in the words of Robert Kagan) is indeed sincere in finding a permanent solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

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ment far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilisations -- the perhaps irrational but historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, on secular present, and worldwide expansion of both" (Bernard Lewis The Roots of Muslim Rage).

While terrorism in any form can never be condoned and the Islamic world has been in the forefront not only in the condemnation of the nine-eleven terrorist acts but also has been at one with the Americans in their war on terror; one may find it difficult to unquestionably believe the pronouncements by the Western leaders that the war on terror should not be seen as war on Islam.

When the US (with UNSC approval) and NATO bombed Afghanistan to stone age to dislodge the despicable Taliban from power the entire Muslim world supported the western military intervention in Afghanistan. But now when at the request of the UN General Assembly the World Court is considering to give an advisory and non-binding ruling on the legality of the Israeli Berlin wall in the occupied territories, Israel is being supported by the west in questioning the authority of the International Court of Justice to hear the complaint against Israel. One is

Eastern "islands of Islam remained an anomaly zone of resistance to the ideals that have toppled authoritarian regimes of the Left and the Right" (Martin Kramer/Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival).

Western scholars have often wondered as to why prospects of democracy are so poor in the Islamic world. Some have argued that while according to the Christian calendar it is twenty-first century, according to the Islamic calendar it is still the fifteenth century. Therefore in accordance with the evolutionary process of civilisation the Muslims are still six hundred years behind the Christians. What is forgotten in this flawed and simplistic argument is that at several points of history the Muslim world was far ahead of the rest of the world in arts and science. Where the Islamic world had perhaps missed out was in adapting itself to the changed situation following the industrial revolution and the European renaissance. A glaring example was the Muslim resistance to English education and its concomitant values in the British India till Sir Syed Ahmed established the Aligarh Muslim University to facilitate extra-religious education to the Muslim students who had already fallen behind the majority community in India in most fields relating to the

Nor does "neighbourhood effect" appear to be tenable if one considers the case of Pakistan being ruled by successive military rulers while its immediate neighbours, India is the largest democracy in the world and Turkey, a Muslim country is considered by the West as among few Muslim countries practicing electoral democracy.

One could, perhaps, with some degree of credence look into the structure of the society of a country resisting democracy such as having a patriarchal society which denies gender equality and also tribalism which dictates "primordial allegiance". For example, the Western society in which the autonomy of the individual is sacrosanct would never understand that in a tribal society helping other members of the tribe is a civic duty and not nepotism. Additionally many of these countries steeped in tribal traditions give precedence to obedience to tribal elders, revenge, blood money, honour killing, polygamy over the other dictates of civil law.

Many political scientists who have studied the question of linkage of democracy with economic development are of the opinion that democratisation is much more likely to occur and take hold in richer rather than poorer countries. They found that economic development

moves, democratic moment arrived along with economic affluence.

In the ultimate analysis, argues Patrick Basham of Cato Institute, in case of Iraq the question is not only the institution of electoral democracy i.e. the right to vote and the parliamentary institution of representative government but liberal democracy i.e. electoral democracy added with the rule of law, independent judiciary, separation of religious and secular authorities, civilian control of the military, freedom in all its aspects. He agrees that all these factors will be difficult to come by.

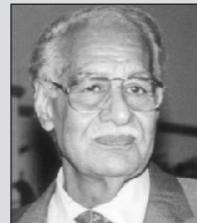
The big question still remaining unanswered by the Americans despite nudges from her European allies is how to bring back the confidence of the Muslims by doing something concrete on the Palestine question after the Baghdad imbroglio. If the Quartet produced "performance based and goal driven" Road Map is to be given life then discussions on the key issues on border, settlement, status of Jerusalem, and the right of the refugees to return have to be addressed in all earnestness. This has again been driven home most recently during the visit to Riyadh by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak who in a joint statement with his Saudi hosts have rejected the US

nowhere near implementation. The decision was first taken at Tashkent in 1966, repeated at Shimla in 1972 and re-enunciated at Lahore in 1999. In fact, the custom authorities do not look kindly if you carry a newspaper from one country to another. History books on Pakistan side do not relate to history. They are a discourse on prejudices. School textbooks say that in the entire history of the subcontinent no other dynasty acquired as much importance as the Mughals. The Hindu period is dismissed in one sentence. In India, the evangelist Muri Manohar Joshi, is rewriting history to placate Hindutva zealots. The University Grants Commission which doles out money to universities is his instrument for destroying education which has been reflecting India's diversity. He has already ousted the Gandhian institutions because they had refused to toe his line. The vandalism carried out at Varanasi and Pune is the result of Joshi's biased interpretation of Indian culture.

The secretary-level meeting should have attended to such issues. "Hastening slowly" may be an interesting form of expression. But it contributes little towards people-to-people contact. If given full scope, people on both sides can have a joint forum which may be able to solve even the most intractable problem like Kashmir.

In any case, the India-Pakistan relationship should not be allowed to slide from the stage it has reached. By keeping the two apart, the governments on both sides have, however, been able to stoke the fires of misinformation and mistrust. They have sowed the seeds of enmity. This has led to hostilities. What the establishments should ask themselves is how far such tactics have helped them or lessened the

Disconnecting people



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

from the government efforts. There was not a single group appointed to look at this aspect, although as many as eight of them were constituted to discuss every pending problem.

Come to think of it, all that is happening is because of the result of people-to-people contact. The governments have done their worst to stall it and run down the organisers. Such efforts are a must if the two countries have to achieve even a modicum of normalisation.

This is not "hastening slowly." This is pouring cold water on whatever unofficial efforts are made to increase people-to-people contact. In any case, the foreign office mandarins on both sides have never been happy over people's initiative.

Both governments want to control the pace of people-to-people contact lest it should become such a force that it could exert pressure on softening borders.

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What the establishments should ask themselves is how far such tactics have helped them or lessened the

difficulties facing their peoples? The fact is that the two countries face a situation which can explode at any time. The danger of a nuclear war makes all the more dangerous.

Is this scenario better than contacts? A study, entitled Cost of Conflict between India and Pakistan says that India has the potential to raise its GDP from 7 per cent to over 10 per cent provided it has stable relations with Pakistan. Similarly,

the report says, the ability of Pakistan to loosen itself from the grip of extremist religious forces depends on, among other things, relations with India.

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