

Punishing success: A risky road for Bangladesh

We Bangladeshis are heirs to a history of struggle against tyranny out of which we emerged with an overwhelming sense of decency and solidarity. Bank accounts can be checked at the banks, deeds can be verified at the land registry, and any matters of compliance with the law can be dealt without a terror that does not belong in Bangladesh.

MANEEZA HOSSAIN

UPON my return with my husband, sister and brother-in-law from an evening out, I was greeted at my the gate of my father's house not by the usual guard, but by scores of uniformed and non-uniformed security forces along with an

equally large contingent of Bangladeshi style paparazzi. Inside, our belongings had been combed through for "evidence" of an unspecified nature. There was an eerie contrast between the courtesy and professionalism of the security team on the one hand, and the ominous action that they had been asked to

undertake upon my family. Under Emergency Rules, so I was informed, I was not entitled to have a look at any warrant justifying their presence at our home. All what I could do is to sit patiently with family members, while our privacy is being dismembered and our life-stories are being reconstituted on two pieces

of paper separated by a carbon-copy sheet. Official deeds, bank statements, personal notes, together with a few lonely bottles of drink leftover from my wedding party just two days ago, everything was being tallied by the dutiful officer as if a major crime scene was being thoroughly investigated. Many in Bangladesh welcomed the drastic and even draconian measures taken by the current government against those accused of having monopolized state and economy. However, instead of fostering an environment of pluralism, the new order seems to be drifting towards

penalizing the successful, while plucking away the bad apples amongst them. In what amounts to populism from a bygone age, the media is engaging in a feeding frenzy of innuendos and "exposés" of wardrobes and personal belongings. If the public focus has lost its reason, it is because of a frustration that has built up over the long years of mismanagement. Bangladesh is entitled to the prosperity that its land and people harbour unfulfilled. Our homeland has indeed been denied its legitimate place in the ranks of progress oriented nations. No doubt that many, if not most, of those

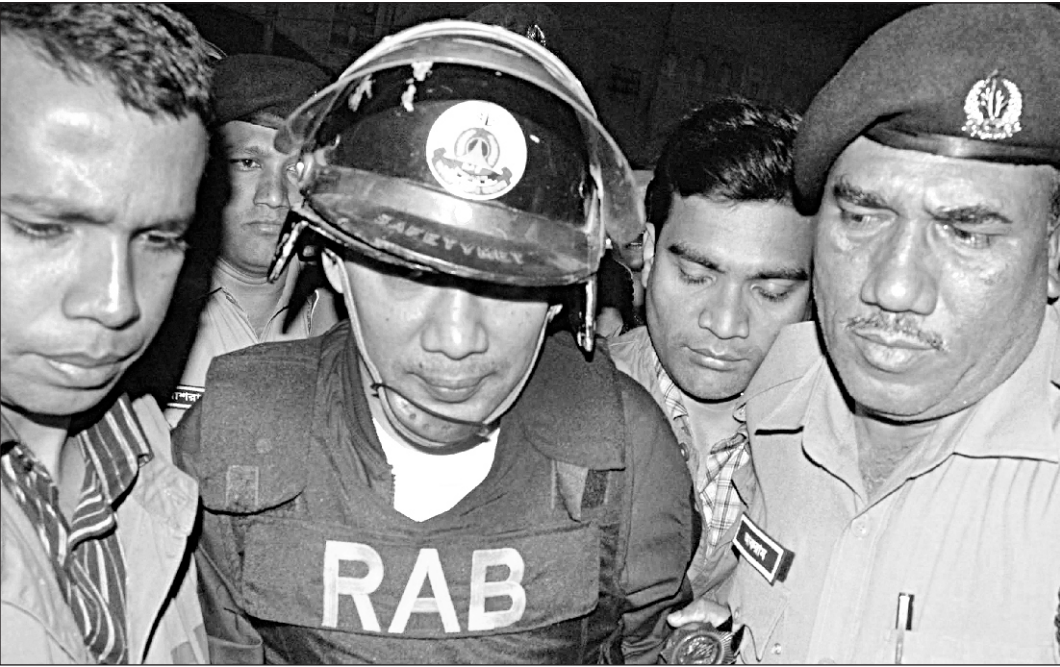
who are in charge today are working diligently with this truth in mind, however we have to recognize the fatal danger of night raid actions that could have been substituted by routine administrative procedures. The intent is surely not to scare the successful from investing in their country. Neither capital flight nor brain drain is in our country's interest. Unfortunately, both are likely outcomes if such actions are not rationalized. While the events that night have had a personal effect on me, they are by no means the only well meaning actions that may lead to counter-productive results. The informal economy should be

integrated and assimilated into the formal structures of our socioeconomic life for Bangladesh's potential to be realized. Demolition, however, is not the magic wand that will do it. While I am certain that the advisors understand this reality, I hope they take into account the fact that without immediate compensatory measures, and without reaching out rather than alienating the successful, the chances of a lasting progress in Bangladesh are rather dim. My nephews were sound asleep when the uniformed gentleman inspected our home and checked the contents of our drawers. No child should be subject to the risk of waking up and seeing a

stranger in the midst of their home, however friendly and orderly that stranger is. We Bangladeshis are heirs to a history of struggle against tyranny out of which we emerged with an overwhelming sense of decency and solidarity. Bank accounts can be checked at the banks, deeds can be verified at the land registry, and any matters of compliance with the law can be dealt without a terror that does not belong in Bangladesh.

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Demise of BNP?



MRIDUL CHOWDHURY

THE recent arrest of Tarique Rahman has generated a wave of jubilation across the country. Before his arrest, there were many who doubted whether this caretaker government (CG) really had the ability to strike at the so-called "root of all evil." Many feared that if Tarique is not touched, much of CG's efforts to uproot corruption from politics would be left incomplete and perhaps even reversed when the CG steps down. By arresting Tarique, the CG has laid all doubts to rest. It has proven that it is powerful and well-meaning enough to get to the top of the corruption pyramid -- which many

thought was unreachable. Now, what are its implications for BNP, a party which has already been rapidly losing ground due to internal conflicts and the increasing lack of popular support due to the arrest of most of its top leaders on corruption charges. This will undoubtedly cause the following things to happen: 1) the BNP leaders who have so far been marginalized due to the authoritarian and often condescending dominance of Tarique will now try to gain ground within the party and voice their grievances against him more openly; 2) Khaleda Zia herself will be increasingly marginalized within the party due to her inevitable and continuing unbridled extension of

support to her son; 3) the internal rift within BNP will rise rapidly as the anti-Tarique camp will try to capitalize on the situation; 4) some corrupt elements within BNP who have so far been sheltered by Tarique may even leave the party thus making the pro-Tarique camp even weaker. Overall, this arrest is bound to weaken BNP to an extent from which it may never really recover. Another important point to take into account is that Tarique's arrest must have the result of a calculated move on the part of the CG and the forces behind it. Those forces perhaps would not risk putting Tarique behind bars unless they were more or less sure that he would not in the near

future come back to become the executive head of the country and take his vengeance out on those who had disgraced him. All of these facts point to the inevitable fact that it will be hard for BNP to ever rise again as a legitimate political strength -- it is an irony that the son of a father known for his personal honesty would stoop down to the level of a godfather of criminals and his arrest would send ripples of jubilation and relief among people of all quarters. His innumerable misdeeds are now sure to surface one by one as more and more people will make their suppressed voices heard. The BNP, like the AL and the Jatiya Party, is an extremely personality-centric political platform that has drawn its legitimacy from the image of Ziaur Rahman. As more and more people get to know about Tarique's desecration of that last name and her mother's blind eye to the shameful exploitation of his position, it is sure to bring down the party's image and acceptance to an irrecoverable state. Although BNP will possibly continue to remain in the political sphere of the country, the question now is whether it will soon join the ranks of Jatiya Party as yet another fallen and disgraced "opposition party" or whether it will re-emerge as a significant political force perhaps with new leadership. Mrdul Chowdhury is a graduate student at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government

Tale of treachery

I am doubly sure that the report involving Faizee would not have seen the light of day had the 4-party alliance -- staunch supporter of Faizee -- come back to power through a sham election on January 22. Many even commented -- however funny it sounds -- that Faizee would have been made chief justice by now had they come back to power. After all, nothing was impossible in their last tenure.

KAZI S.M. KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

BELIEVE me! I have no personal grudge against Mr. Faizee. For very valid reasons, however, he has now become an icon of forgery. By no stretch of imagination can a fraudster like him be a matter of such coverage as he is receiving now. Unfortunately for the nation, however, this has happened. Yes, it was a clear case of forgery by some members of the Chittagong University staff, and the ambitious blockhead Faisal Mahmud Faizee was one of the many beneficiaries. This was a case of blatant fraud on the part of Faizee as well, since he used that forged document to enter the bar and then spoil the sanctity of the judiciary. Yes, he deserves no mercy. Because his offence is of a grave nature, he can initially be charged under the criminal procedure code. But, what about the people that went to great lengths to defend him to the last? Did they commit a lesser crime? Does one need to be a legal expert to comment that they had committed a serious felony? Many people of the land know by now that those people included some key people within the judiciary, and people within the previous 4-party alliance government, who kept on providing Faizee with all the ammunition to make a mockery of the

judiciary. The whole nation wondered how an impostor could be so brazenly backed by the state machinery. The state machinery resorted to tyranny as well, by using the judiciary to silence the dissenting voices. Yes, the judiciary meted out punishments of various categories to the media people -- belonging to Prothom Alo and Bhorer Kagoj -- for bringing out the forgery issue in public. What requital for the people who came to the rescue of the prestige of the judiciary! One wonders how the judges delivered their judgment against the journalists even before resolution of the forgery issue by the Chittagong University authorities. It is to be noted here that two major dailies, Prothom Alo and Bhorer Kagoj, reported on October 30, 2004, that Faizee, one of the 19 additional judges appointed on August 23, 2004, had tampered with his mark sheet of the Muslim Law examinations he sat for from Chittagong Law College in 1989. They also mentioned in their reports that a Chittagong University enquiry committee formed on April 25, 1996, had revealed the fraud. Fortunately for the judiciary, however, the judgment was kept in abeyance by another bench. The punishment was served in a contempt of court case moved by Faizee's father. That Faizee's father

lied in the affidavit has now been proved beyond doubt by the Chittagong University decision to cancel Faizee's LLB mark sheet because of tampering. Thus, Faizee's father, despite being a lawyer himself, committed a criminal offence for which he, too, can be prosecuted. Interestingly, the then ministry of law under Barrister Moudud Ahmed was also said to be instrumental in promoting Faizee. The then Chittagong University administration can also hardly be absolved. Whether due to pressure from, or loyalty to, the alliance in power, the then Chittagong University administration did not play a proactive role in salvaging the situation. Whereas the duty of the University administration was to cooperate with the people who were trying to sort out the forgery issue, it literally connived with the Faizee sympathizers by keeping mum. Will it, then, be an exaggeration if it is complained that Faizee and the people that blindly backed and promoted him, in fact, committed a treachery against the country by putting the altar of justice, as well as the last resort of the oppressed -- the judiciary -- in real jeopardy? It is only by luck that the forgery has at last been unveiled, thanks to the advent of a reform-oriented caretaker government under the leadership of Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed.

I am doubly sure that the report involving Faizee would not have seen the light of day had the 4-party alliance -- staunch supporter of Faizee -- come back to power through a sham election on January 22. Many even commented -- however funny it sounds -- that Faizee would have been made chief justice by now had they come back to power. After all, nothing was impossible in their last tenure. The bottom line is that the Faizee episode was not an isolated issue. It was, to my mind, a culmination of the previous government's rampant penchant for politicization of the judiciary. Though this sort of politicization had been going on for quite a long period, the previous alliance government dealt deathblows to the image and viability of the judiciary. Admittedly, some other extremely controversial issues coupled with the unforgivable Faizee scam brought the judiciary to the brink of total collapse. Yes, their brawn power grew so wild that they acted frivolously with almost every state institution, and the judiciary was one of the terrible casualties. A new chief justice has taken oath, and vowed to bring back discipline in the judiciary. As a citizen of the country I, first of all, seek a strong judicial enquiry into the whole gamut of affairs relating to the Faizee anecdote which, to all intents and purposes, amounts to treachery against the country, for which all the culprits behind it should be exposed to justice for the sake of the judiciary itself, if not anything else.

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'Bangladesh successfully feeds 10 percent of the Chinese population in just 1.4 percent of Chinese territory. This is a miracle.'

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Rezauul Karim and Ashfaq Wares Khan, outgoing Chinese Ambassador Chai Xi suggests that Bangladesh requires strong and dynamic leadership, widespread reforms, and political stability to emulate China's astronomic rise on the world stage. Here we print an edited version of the ambassador's comments:

IF you could produce dynamic and efficient leadership you will produce stability and peace. The change that it will bring would be miraculous. China's, and its people's, performance has been determined by the two decades of reforms, development, and stability ensured by the government. The current caretaker government's strong-handed drive to clean up crime and corruption is laudable, and is encouraging for the future stability of Bangladesh. Development is the fundamental principle. It is a multi-faceted force and the only way to achieve modernisation. Stability assists the process for development and reform, while development and reform will bring about consistent stability. This was brought about by China's collective government to teach the people to open up their minds to be more innovative. However, it would be quite difficult to implement these reforms in Bangladesh. Although there is great potential dense population is a problem, but is also a driving force. The government must look to implement the right policy. They may try to accelerate economic development through improving infrastructure, improving governance, and maybe by giving more incentive to foreign companies for more foreign investment. Basically, I think they have to improve the investment climate. They also have to improve infrastructure. The total trade volume between China and Bangladesh

almost doubled, up to \$3 billion, making it Bangladesh's second biggest trade partner after India. The people of Bangladesh and China are intelligent and diligent. We have had to experience difficulties in the past that you are going through now. We did something because we had stability and peace. Bangladesh and China both have dense populations and, therefore, share a number of similar challenges. Bangladesh could learn from China's innovations and speed of economic development to push up living standards. I see similarities between China's Cultural Revolution and Bangladesh's current state, when people are suffering as a result of regressive policies and in-fighting among the leaders. However, China has made great strides since launching wide-ranging reforms and opening up its economy to the world. The Chinese Communist Party could make such massive strides because of their decision to put people first, especially the rural poor. If you want to create a harmonious society, you have to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural. That is why our government put great importance on rural development. You need to raise the income of the rural peasants through state inducements. From last year, the peasants had to stop paying all agricultural taxes, something they have had to pay for 2,600 years. Infrastructure development has

been shifted from the urban to the rural. It is important to reduce their burden, and to raise their income by investing in rural infrastructure, education, and health. Farmers are more eager to produce, and their grain production is booming. China needs to be self-sufficient and this is what sustains us. In Bangladesh, there is not a single expressway. A new Dhaka to Chittagong expressway is essential to create a new lifeline for the country. China's driving force is its private companies and the government's open door policies. Bangladesh should try to develop its tourism sector by creating special zones in places like the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and improving tourist facilities. Improving the ethnic tribes' living standards would certainly reduce their political tensions. Strategically, I believe, a deep sea port is necessary for the Bangladeshi economy. The existing Chittagong port is not satisfactory and needs to be modified. A Chinese company is already working there to develop the port. It was a breakthrough for China to get observer status for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. That would help in developing more a concrete relationship between China and the region. China is eager to help, cooperate in, and speed up the economic development of the smaller countries in the region to foster peace and maintain an amicable relation-

ship with its bordering countries. China has assisted Bangladesh both militarily and economically for many years. We have built six bridges for Bangladesh, one of which is currently being completed in Munshiganj. China's friendship with Bangladesh is also embodied by the China-Bangladesh Friendship Centre in Dhaka. Geo-strategically, Bangladesh is very important as the link between South-East Asia and South Asia and, as such, Bangladesh should substantiate its "Look East" policy and not be stuck on rhetoric. For instance, road links and air links with East Asian countries must develop further. I personally followed up with establishing air links between China and Bangladesh, now the government must follow up its words with actions. Bangladesh and China have a tradition in defence cooperation, as China has provided and sold necessary equipment to the Bangladesh armed forces. Recently, officers have also been going to China for training. Many Chinese companies, ranging from textiles to cement, are interested in investing in Bangladesh, but the country must improve its political stability. He said that Bangladesh could learn two very important lessons from China's investment policies. Firstly, China realised that foreign companies must be allowed to make a profit out of their operations through several incentive policies. Secondly, the government must invest in infrastructure to facilitate trade. But it is imperative to improve governance and raise the bureaucracy's efficiency. In China we have one-stop service for foreign investors, in Bangladesh you have to wait for months to get a visa, not to

mention a working permit. Bangladesh has some strong points to attract investment, such as a cheap, diligent and intelligent labour force, and also favourable access to Europe. China-Bangladesh relations China and Bangladesh are close neighbours, and the traditional friendship between the two countries dated back to ancient times and was deeply rooted in the hearts of the two peoples. Friendly relations between the two countries have been developing soundly and smoothly since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975. On the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence and in accordance with mutual benefits, China and Bangladesh have forged all-round and multi-faceted exchanges and cooperation in politics, economy, trade, culture, science and technology, with outstanding achievements. I have tried my best to further improve the friendly relations and cooperation between the two countries. I feel proud about putting in special efforts to facilitate the establishment of the direct air-link between Beijing and Dhaka via Kunming. Chinese development The Chinese experience shows that a government's performance in addressing reform, development and stability determines the performance of the country and its people. Development is a fundamental principle. Reform is the motive force of development and is the only way to modernization. Stability serves as the precondition for development and reform, and development and reform will bring about consistent stability.

As a half-Bangladeshi, I always share the grief with you when the appalling floods and typhoons occur, and feel the common delight in witnessing the country getting out of difficulty thanks to the people's profound courage and wisdom. I laud the fast development in the textile and garments industry, the increase of export income, and the moderate GDP growth in Bangladesh. Bangladesh successfully feeds 10 percent of the Chinese population in just 1.4 percent of Chinese territory. As Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has said, this is a miracle. Bangladesh was a land of 140 million diligent and intelligent people, and it has tremendous potential for social advancement and economic development. There is every reason to believe in the better future of Bangladesh, as long as it is piloted under honest, dynamic and efficient leadership. Dhaka days This is my fifth posting to Bangladesh and during my 30 year diplomatic career most of the time had been devoted to Bangladeshi affairs, no matter whether I am in Dhaka or Beijing. In Dhaka alone, I spent 50 percent of my diplomatic life in different capacities. From a student of Dhaka University to the ambassador of China to Bangladesh, I had the opportunity to see through my eyes the amazing changes in the society, the remarkable development of the economy and the great improvement of the people's life. I took admission at the Modern Language Institute of Dhaka University in August 1976, which was just one year after opening of the Chinese embassy in Dhaka. With the advantage of knowing the Bangla language, I tried for 30 years to study and understand



Bangladesh and its people, and I think that I have come to know them. I could deeply feel the true love and genuine friendship of the people of this country for the people of China. Therefore, I have special feelings for Bangladesh and its people, and consider Dhaka as my second home. I have made a lot of good friends in various walks of life and had a wonderful time in this country. I like everything in Bangladesh, from food to dress. I like to wear panjabi, and my wife saree. I have only one daughter and she can speak Bangla too, and she knows Bangladeshi dance. My daughter received dance training from Nipa at China-Bangladesh Friendship School in Beijing, which was set up during

Ershad regime. Ershad sent the then minister Anwar Zahid with a cheque of one million dollars for the school, as a thank you gesture for constructing the Buriganga Bridge in Dhaka. I have to admit the complex emotions in my heart. For diplomats, we always move on in our jobs during service life, but that does not mean we move on in our friendship. To quote a famous ancient Chinese poem: "As long as you have a friend who knows your heart, distance can't keep you two apart." Wherever I may be, I will always recall with pride and honour my good friends in Bangladesh. Wherever I may be, I will always cherish the good memory of my life in Bangladesh and the friendship with all.