

Ban on indoor politics

Don't let restrictions go beyond three months

LA W Adviser Mainul Hosein has suggested that the ban on indoor politics may be lifted within three months. On one hand, it is encouraging news, given that it raises hopes all around about politics getting back on track as the elections approach. On the other, there arises the very justified question as to why a lifting of the ban should take three months and not less. To be sure, the government has lately felt that political parties have been taking advantage of its flexibility through indulging in partisan politics in the name of discussions and seminars and the like. Hence the present ban on anything that smacks of political activities. Despite the ban, and despite Mainul Hosein's latest thoughts on the issue, there are some very real concerns that need addressing by the administration.

Those concerns centre on the fact that individuals and organisations have either had to suspend, halfway, discussions on some pretty innocuous subjects owing to the fear that such discussions might veer off into political talk; or they have dispensed altogether with the idea of such and similar deliberations altogether in view of the emergency restrictions. The result has been that even symposia and seminars organized by civil society at various intellectual levels, such as talk on the economy or discussions at book launches have been abandoned. It is here that the authorities need to define the parameters of the ban on discussions. Moreover, in this on-going month of March, a sense of history will necessarily come into any reflection on it. Here too a certain degree of openness ought to come where thoughts on the significance of March 1971 are concerned, of course with the proviso that those reflections will have no bearing on the present state of national politics. The political parties, for their part, will do the country much good by resisting the temptation to utilise such opportunities for narrow politicking. An important corollary of politics, banned or otherwise, is the media, which must report everything that goes on in the political, social and cultural arena. The wisest thing the caretaker authorities could do in this respect is to acknowledge this right of the media to present facts before their audience without fear of reprisal.

All said and done, the compulsions relating to a ban on indoor politics, or indeed politics as it is meant to be, are understandable. And yet politics serves as the fundamentals upon which a society functions. The vibrancy of a state is directly dependent on the degree of political openness its citizens enjoy. It is for reasons such as these that we appreciate the government's lifting of the ban on indoor politics and at the same time hope that the ban does not extend beyond the three months the law adviser has spoken about. Last but not least, it is time the country was provided with a tentative idea about the next election.

Time Israel shunned its intransigence

The Palestinians need justice, not pity

FOR the last two years or more the Palestinians are being made to pay for their democratic choice. The matter is made even more poignant when a broad brush of 'terrorists' is painted over them by Israel that itself is a country that was born out of terrorism and still continues to indulge in state terrorism against the Palestinians.

Israel continues to perpetrate the vilest form of physical violence on the Palestinians, with the support of its biggest sponsor. By its intransigence on the matter of recognizing the PLA government and by refusing to acknowledge or to deal with it, Israel has tried to stifle a fledgling government. Not only that it has continued to maintain its obdurate stance on the PLA government, which now includes both the Fatah and Hamas members, it has now called upon the world community to boycott the new government.

However, the positive aspect, and one that gives us the hope, is that not all are willing to toe its line and abide by the Israeli call for boycott of the newly recast PLA government. Some European countries have shown their interest to deal with the new government unconditionally while the EU has shown its readiness to do so on the basis of the internationally set conditions for Middle East peace.

While not taking away the right of any country to resist aggression or oppression, we feel that time has come for the two antagonists to determine their strategy in solving the long standing issue. While violence can only be resisted by violence, that cannot be a permanent mechanism for one's existence nor can that be the strategy for survival. But one must not also lose sight of the fact that peace can not be achieved without justice. For the last sixty years justice is what the Palestinians have been looking for and for the last sixty years it is what they have been consistently denied, through the nexus of the obnoxious and the profane.

Justice is the sine-qua-non for peace in the region and the powers that matter must ensure that it happens. The Palestinians deserve justice not pity.

CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

FEW presidents have exercised so much influence over the formulation and execution of America's post - World War II foreign policy than Harry S. Truman, an inconspicuous figure, who, when took the presidential oath of office after Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, had hardly any experience in international affairs and was widely considered as "a man too small for his job."

Yet, he rose to the occasion and took decisions of far-reaching consequences at a feverish pace on important matters like arranging an international meeting in San Francisco to establish the United Nations, accepting the surrender of Germany in May, attending the Potsdam conference for peace, issuing orders to drop atomic bombs on civilian targets for the

The end of an era?

PERSPECTIVES

The demon of BNP may have been physically removed from the scene, but its perverted legacy will die hard. Many of the evils created by it in all sectors of the governance will be difficult to wash away. If we really want to see the era of nightmare produced by the BNP since 1975 to come to an end, we will have to face the formidable challenges that still lie ahead.

M ABDUL HAFIZ

HUMBLED and humiliated by events that followed the end of the BNP's incumbency in power a forlorn Begum Khaleda Zia has practically gone back into her cocoon, while her prodigal son -- now incarcerated in jail -- quietly licks his wounds. Till recently the BNP supreme was the prima-donna of a charmed circle of psychopaths who formed a beeline for her favour, and the son, a crown prince of sorts surrounded by his buddies.

They all seem to have vanished after they had their share of the booty, and abandoned both the mother and son with the blemish of impropriety. The cheerleaders that frequented their offices during their

halcyon days have also disappeared. The BNP's dream palace has collapsed like a house of cards. Few think that the dented party can withstand the blow that it has received.

Yet, the BNP came into being with a bang under the aegis of the late General Ziaur Rahman, the sole beneficiary of the 1975 putsch. Then the BNP's chariot moved on inexorably, and it ruled this country for the longest period, with an interregnum during the Ershad regime, which, however, followed the BNP's ideological script. With Zia at the helm, the BNP put the clock back by tampering with the founding principles of the republic and reintroducing the politics of reaction and obscurantism.

They rehabilitated the so-called custodians of the religion, the collaborators of 1971, thus desecrating the soul of the nation. Both General Ershad and Mrs Zia pursued the same policy of making religion a political issue during their long rules, when unprecedented plunder and grab mentality flourished in the country which bled incessantly, losing all of its vitality. The organised terror turned the country virtually into a killing field. The twenty-first August grenade attack targeting AL's entire leadership had perhaps been the magnum opus of BNP's terror strategies.

The leadership of BNP, coupled with power, came to Mrs. Zia almost as a trouvaille, which she never deserved with her intellec-

tual standard. It was, therefore, not surprising that she failed to show much savoir-faire, her chemistry lacked gumption and there was no magnanimity in her lexicon. Like any despot, she only demanded obeisance. She hastened her fall, as well as that of the party, by asking too much from an already compliant president. In the end that proved to be the proverbial last straw on the camel's back.

The BNP's huge edifice has apparently crumbled, and its carefully crafted ambitious gambits have failed. With few sympathizers around the party is searching for footholds afresh, and is groping for the direction it has lost. The analysts are unanimous in their view that the BNP may not, anymore, be able to remain in its

old shape and strength even if it survives. There may emerge a number of splinter groups aligning themselves with other parties.

The severest body blow had been dealt to the party by the fate of Tarique Zia, who is now down in the dumps. Moreover, the planks on which the BNP capitalized politically are no more there, with the dirty face of the party and its members being exposed to the people. As a result even the remnants of the party will have little to go to the people with. The moral turpitude of the leaders at all levels will continue to be a liability for the party.

Can we then conclude that the era of the BNP doing politics under the rubric of Zia's brand of nationalism is over? After the political change of 1975, under the sheer weight of propaganda, nationalism gained some currency. But not only are there many things questionable in it, it also negates the values of our independence war. Therefore, there is room for rethinking even within the BNP.

The BNP's policy and strategy have already been a matter of gross aberration in our politics, which has deflected many from

what we fought for in creating an independent Bangladesh. Even if the BNP is politically humbled due to various adversities facing the party, its tentacles are spread out all over the country. It has successfully diverted an entire generation from the truth and our moral values. History has been perversely distorted, our seats of education have been defiled and divorced from idealism, and our youth are adopting an alien culture. The BNP polluted them with cheap money and the mantra of consumerism.

The demon of BNP may have been physically removed from the scene, but its perverted legacy will die hard. Many of the evils created by it in all sectors of the governance will be difficult to wash away. If we really want to see the era of nightmare produced by the BNP since 1975 to come to an end, we will have to face the formidable challenges that still lie ahead.

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BLISS.

Prophet of the poor

I did not get all my questions answered. I am not sure how capitalism can be turned upside down. I kept pondering as I sipped from my cup of decaf. It was getting late -- I decided not to take the real coffee. But I saw a plain-speaking, honest, confident, and down-to-earth individual who can deliver. He is not just a banker to the poor -- he is the prophet of the poor.

IRTISHAD AHMAD

D R. Mohammad Yunus, the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner, was in Miami on March 15, 2007 to receive an award from the ABICC -- Association of Bi-National Chambers of Commerce in Florida. It was a rare opportunity for me so I decided not to pass it up. I was almost an hour early at the Ritz Carlton in Coconut Grove near downtown Miami.

The grandeur of the lobby -- typical of a Ritz Carlton Hotel -- incited a thought almost inescapably; the champion of the poor at a Ritz Carlton to receive an award from the champions of capitalism in a black tie dinner event! "Oh, well," I said to myself, "Why not? He got the Nobel Peace Prize. It is about world peace. What has capitalism got to do with it?"

But then the particular award he was getting was for "Leadership in Global Trade" and his presentation for the evening was titled, "Capitalism -- a half-told story." Poverty, peace, capitalism, and trade -- what is the link? I was getting really excited to hear Dr. Yunus. Hopefully, he will provide a clue.

There were about five hundred guests, the event was sold-out. About fifty or so Bangladeshis residing in Miami and the vicinity

came in their best attire and with a sense of zealous pride to cheer Professor Yunus. After all Yunus is a son of Bangladesh. A Bangladeshi hardly becomes a world celebrity -- with the notable exception of Professor Yunus, of course! Why would not Bangladeshis be proud of him? Capitalism has nothing to do with it.

There was a slight allusion of curiosity, too. Is he going to say anything about his desire to enter politics in Bangladesh, as he recently announced? He even picked a name for his party, *Nagarik Shakti* (Citizen Power).

Rumors were floating and myriad opinions were being heard regarding his political ambition and the current state of politics in Bangladesh. The existing uncertainty in Bangladesh politics added an extra dimension of significance to this event among the Bangladeshis present and they were not at all shy in talking about this.

Yunus finally appeared at about 8 PM in the banquet hall, in his typical *panjabi* and vest. Yunus is one of those illustrious world figures, who can get by with their unique (read eccentric) outfits.

In this regard, he has successfully aligned himself with the likes of Gandhi, Arafat, Mandela and

Castro. One could add Bhasani and Mujib to this list also. They have chosen to defy conventional dress code by sticking to their own choices. I hear them telling the world, "I do not have to accept your norms, conventions or codes. You will have to accept me with my choice." And the world complies. Dr. Yunus achieved that status and privilege to be an eccentric.

After the national anthems of the two countries -- USA and Bangladesh, and a few musicals by Bangladeshi performers dinner was served. After dinner Professor Yunus was invited at the podium to give his talk. He spoke for about forty minutes, without a script. And everybody listened to him, in a pin-drop silence.

He talked about the poor and poverty with a kind of zeal and enthusiasm never heard before. Yunus may have become controversial, but he sounds genuine, sincere and passionate about his work, his mission and his vision.

"If you want to know the cause of poverty, do not look at the poor, look somewhere else," Yunus said.

"Credit should be a basic human right. How can one start from nothing? Dollar catches dollars, how can you deny someone from gaining access to that

first dollar?" He asked matter-of-factly. He laments; conventional banks deny the poor loans saying they are not credit-worthy. He retorted, "I say, ask yourselves -- are you people-worthy?"

He has bigger plans. He seems to have the courage to dream the impossible, the confidence that it will materialize, and the energy to undertake the unthinkable. To him, it seems, politics is just an extension of what he is already doing -- business with a purpose to send poverty to museum.

Perhaps he is thinking that political power will enable him to do what he wants to do quickly and effectively. Perhaps he has developed a simplistic view of politics -- that in order to turn politics into social business all you need is good business skill and management know-how.

But is politics that simple? Why not? Perhaps with his proven business acumen and successful management style, Yunus thinks he can be a good politician, too. Why not?

His decision to enter in the political arena of Bangladesh seems trivial when compared to his grand vision for the future of the world. I got the sense that political power to him is the means, not the end. He dreams of a poverty-free world, not just of a prosperous Bangladesh.

He asserted the other half of the capitalism story is the real story and the right story. People will invest to make other people happy and successful. He wants to introduce a new economic theory -- the other half of the capitalism story.

In this respect he is compara-

ble to Karl Marx in terms of the magnitude of the intended impact of his (Yunus's) social business concept. Marx's characterization of capitalism is not as disputed as his criticism of it. Yunus, on the other hand, is not criticizing capitalism -- he is asking to alter its characteristics, to change its motive. Will the capitalists of the world accept his characterization and behave accordingly? Why not?

He suggested -- capitalism does not have to be about profit only -- it can be about satisfaction derived from helping others, too. He dubbed this concept social business, business to do good to the society. To me, it sounded like de-cafeinated coffee, popular to many Americans that like the smell of coffee but cannot sleep if consumed too much.

He was prompt to point out that it (social business) is not charity, it is still business. He said, " ... that is what I am involved in." And, he went on, " ... that is what I got Franck Riboud (Danone President and CEO) involved in it to produce nutritious yogurt for poverty-stricken Bangladeshi children." He had at least one success story to tell.

His vision is to send poverty to museum. Yunus said poverty is not natural, it is artificial. So, it must go. Poverty does not belong in this world. I have not heard anybody saying such things with such a conviction. In this regard, he is comparable to Gandhi. Gandhi did not just fight for the independence of India he dreamed of the spiritual emancipation for the people of the world.

Professor Yunus did not say

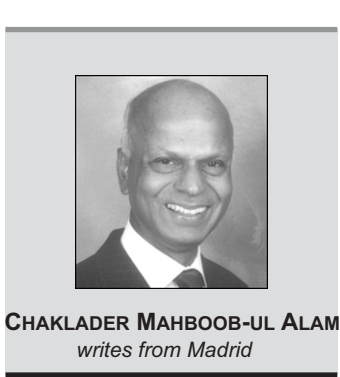
anything about his plan to get involved in politics of Bangladesh, but it seems he did not change his mind -- he is staying on. He jokingly said if he knew he was so popular in Miami, maybe he would have joined politics in Miami instead of Bangladesh.

The host of the event wished him good luck and predicted that Yunus will become the President of Bangladesh since past recipients of the ABICC award included Lech Walesa (Poland), Violeta Chamorro (Nicaragua), Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (Bolivia), Cesar Gaviria (Colombia), and Oscar Arias (Costa Rica -- also a Nobel Peace Prize winner), who became the heads of their respective countries after they received the award. Why not Yunus!

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The Truman legacy



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

FEW presidents have exercised so much influence over the formulation and execution of America's post - World War II foreign policy than Harry S. Truman, an inconspicuous figure, who, when took the presidential oath of office after Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, had hardly any experience in international affairs and was widely considered as "a man too small for his job."

Yet, he rose to the occasion and took decisions of far-reaching consequences at a feverish pace on important matters like arranging an international meeting in San Francisco to establish the United Nations, accepting the surrender of Germany in May, attending the Potsdam conference for peace, issuing orders to drop atomic bombs on civilian targets for the

LETTER FROM EUROPE

The strategy used to convince the American people, many of whom were firm isolationists, to shell out millions of tax dollars to support an open-ended interventionist policy, fitted the American psyche. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, who had had played an important role in the formulation of the administration's foreign policy advised Truman to "scare the hell out of the American people."

first time in history and approving the Marshall Plan which contributed enormously to the economic recovery of Europe. During his presidency, the Central Intelligence Agency was established and the Nato pact was signed.

March 12, 2007 was the 60th anniversary of the enunciation of the Truman doctrine. If the intention of the Monroe doctrine of 1823 was to convert the Western hemisphere into America's backyard, the scope of Truman doctrine was even wider.

Through the application of this doctrine, "for the first time in history, the United States had chosen to intervene during a period of general peace in the affairs of peoples outside North and South America." This was a momentous decision.

In one way or another it has shaped American foreign policy

ever since. However, there was a fundamental difference between these two doctrines as far as America's military capability to enforce them was concerned.

In 1823, the US was well aware of the fact that it needed the active support of the British Navy to enforce the Monroe doctrine because it lacked the military power to do it alone.

In fact, the idea to prevent other European powers, especially Spain and France, from intervening in the affairs of the newly independent countries of the Western Hemisphere was planned jointly by the British Foreign Office and the US State Department.

The US wanted to project its influence beyond its borders all over the Western Hemisphere. Britain was happy to oblige because it wanted commerce with these countries which it would have lost had the European pow-

ers re-colonised them.

The circumstances under which the Truman doctrine was enunciated were completely different. By the beginning of 1947, it had become painfully clear that Britain was no longer a world power. The British economy was in ruins because of the enormous efforts made during the war.

The decolonisation process had already started -- India would soon become independent. On February 21, 1947, Britain sent a message to the US State Department communicating the decision to withdraw its 40,000 troops from Greece, where they were engaged in supporting the conservative elements in a civil war against the leftists.

The US, which had come out of the war, militarily and economically stronger than before was only too happy to fill the gap. Truman "seized the opportunity to declare

a world-wide, open-ended doctrine."

On March 12, 1947, Truman stood before a joint session of the Congress and asked for aid for Greece and Turkey. Truman described the Greek situation as a struggle between "good and evil."

He declared, "I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." Thus the stage was set for future American interventions all over the world in the name of "freedom" and ever-increasing military expenditures. Thus Britain passed the baton to the United States which from then onwards became the new world empire.

The strategy used to convince the American people, many of whom were firm isolationists, to shell out millions of tax dollars to support an open-ended interventionist policy, fitted the American psyche. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, who had had played an important role in the formulation of the administration's foreign policy advised Truman to "scare the hell out of the American people."

Truman followed his advice. He described the situation in terms of a religious war, a struggle between

light and darkness on which the fate of the United States and indeed the fate of the whole world depended.

Long before Kissinger's use of the so-called domino theory to create havoc in South-East Asia the Truman administration argued that if Greece fell to the Communists, Turkey and most of the Middle East would follow.

Under-Secretary Dean Acheson even suggested that Italy, Germany and France could also become easy targets. In the United States, this atmosphere of fear was also responsible for the rise of McCarthyism and the introduction of loyalty oaths and security checks.

All this is relevant today. American foreign policy is still guided by the same simplistic rhetoric, the same paranoid language and the same fear tactics. Only thing that has changed is the name of the perceived enemy. It is no longer communism but Islamic terrorism.

It is not easy to make an objective assessment of such an eventful presidency as that of President Truman in absolute terms. When Truman came into office almost by accident, he was an untested leader. He left the presidency with the reputation of being a man who

was thoroughly honest in his personal affairs and had taken decisive measures on a number of tough global issues under very difficult circumstances.

But in view of American involvement in so many military conflicts (both overt and covert) across the globe over the last sixty years, the vast amount of money spent on armaments and the sense of fear and animosity created in many parts of the world, it is pertinent to ask: Did the aggressive foreign policy embodied in the Truman Doctrine achieve its objectives or was it largely counter-productive?

The writer is a columnist for the Daily Star.