

# Legacy of ruin

ABDUL HANNAN

It is indeed a strange irony of fate that a person who was aspiring soon to be anointed with the crown of an undisputed ruler of the country ended up in jail on charge of corruption. His is typical of a Shakespearian tragic hero who from an exalted position suffers reversal of fortune as retribution by way of poetic justice from a tragic flaw in his character.

The tragic flaw in the character of Tarique Rahman was his vaulting ambition, insatiable greed, and above all, the folly of pride and arrogance of power. Yet, a fair share of the blame for the phenomena of rise, decline and fall of Tarique Rahman must lie with his mother Khaleda Zia, the former prime minister who remained cynically impervious to his high handed excesses and gross misdeeds as an influence peddler to amass allegedly huge personal fortune and riches by underhand business deals and kickbacks.

By giving indulgence, if not active support to her son's indiscretions, she not only brought about her son's downfall but also presided over the liquidation of her vainglorious empire built, as reported extensively by newspapers, on absolute rule, plunder of national wealth, lie and deception, politics of plots and stratagems to crush the opposition and perpetuate her rule. But as truth always triumphs over falsehood, right over wrong, the edifice of her fond illusions of a return to power by

manipulation and maneuverings has crashed and come tumbling down.

One after another, her son, her cabinet colleagues, her party leaders and law makers, cronies and henchmen are in jail on charge of corruption, criminal accumulation of unaccounted for fabulous wealth, thievery of relief materials for the poor and the destitute, expropriation of government land and properties, fleecing public exchequer, money laundering, lavish life style of owning multiple luxury houses, apartments and vast acres of countryside fun retreat with horse, deer and peacock safari park and a fleet of expensive duty free cars.

It is difficult to believe that she was unaware of the rot within her party. Some are in hiding, others are on the run. She is left forlorn with her hopes shattered and dreams dashed.

Her legacy is that her party, BNP, founded by her husband, late lamented President Ziaur Rahman untainted by any blemish, has lost its legitimacy and is in ruins. This is a harsh verdict of history. It will be quite some time for the BNP to pick up the pieces. One thing is clear that traditional politics in Bangladesh will not be the same again but yield to emergence of a new culture of politics by honest and competent people dedicated to serving the interest and welfare of people.

The composition of recent 4-member delegation each of Awami League and BNP to the election commission for early election, in such an overpowering culture

BNP came to power for the second time with a resounding mandate of popular victory. People voted for BNP as an alternative for a change for the better. It was most unfortunate that its leadership opted to fritter away the opportunity, become irresponsible and betray the trust of the people. It lost sight of the lesson of election debacle of Awami League which was punished for not performing. The welcome change of guards on January 11 as a savior of the nation has removed the darkening shadow of gloom and doom from the horizon of national landscape.

significantly predominated by former civil servants, conspicuously to the exclusion of senior politicians signalled the bankruptcy of two major political parties which must share equally the blame for betrayal of democracy.

The judiciary lost its credibility as it was twisted, turned and tailored at will to suit the needs and benefit of the regime. The Constitution was treated as a triviality when it was toyed and tinkered with interpolation and amendments providing for declaration of the independence of Bangladesh by Ziaur Rahman and raising the retirement age limit of Judges of the Supreme Court with the objective of making electoral gains.

Election pledge to separate the judiciary from the executive was breached regardless of 12 directives by the Supreme Court to take urgent action on the matter. Under her rule, kleptocracy, official corruption, was nourished and nurtured in gay abandon as an institution. The independent anti-corruption commission, instituted at the behest of donors was a mockery as it was deliberately rendered completely toothless and dysfunctional.

It was frightening to see how a whole society was divided and splintered down in the middle by the evil of totalitarian regimentation based on party loyalty, in its every layer including bureaucracy, public service commission, teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, trade unions, journalists and intelligentsia creating an adversarial environment of distrust and enmity and destroying the fabric of national unity.

In such an overpowering culture

of politicisation, civil service lost its neutrality. Merit, talent and seniority became a casualty. The mediocrity, the inefficient and the dishonest thrived and prospered causing long-term national damage.

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Khaleda Zia cared little to listen to public opinion and assembled an inordinately large 60-member cabinet of ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers, besides a number of courtier advisers with the status of ministers. In style and substance her rule provided the most riveting image of personality cult.

Like a megalomaniac authoritarian ruler who would brook no dissent or challenge to her authority, she showed the door of Bangabhaban to President Badruddoza Chowdhury, one of the founding members of BNP, for not visiting the grave of Ziaur Rahman and expelled BNP lawmaker Abu Hena from the party for his criticism of some corrupt ministers and law makers.

President B Chowdhury suffered the humiliating exit without a murmuring demur. As reported by newspapers, Nurul Islam, secretary in the PMO, lost his job and was framed up because he incurred her wrath for sending a letter containing allegations against Tarique Rahman to the relevant ministry.

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was manifest in the brutal suppression of discontent and protest demonstration by ordinary villagers of Kansat and Fulbari coal field demanding electricity and protection against ecological disaster and dispossession from their land and ancestral homes.

Yet, the crisis in the power sector, commotion in the coalfield and price rise were the result of mismanagement, bungling and corruption by the authorities. She explained the price rise of essential commodities as a sign of purchasing power of people in a free market economy.

She praised the high-rise buildings and spick and span shopping malls as a sign of rise in the standard of living of people completely oblivious of famished people in the north dying of starvation and the vast poor multitude sinking deeper and deeper in denial, deprivation and indignity.

A stranger to ethics and morality in politics, Khaleda Zia as a matter of political expediency to win victory in election, crafted electoral alliance with fundamentalists Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote regardless of their black record of collaboration with Pakistani occupation

army which carried on atrocities and genocide in the then East Pakistan.

Her stubborn pursuit of return to power by resorting to every conceivable machination and subterfuge at the risk of throwing the country on the verge of a civil war was alarming. The politicisation of the entire election machinery, the extension of retirement age of supreme court judges in order to have a chief adviser of the caretaker government sympathetic to BNP and the unprecedented step of President Iajuddin Ahmed himself taking over as the chief adviser of the caretaker government are some of the glaring examples.

The darkest chapter of her rule was the rise of terrorist activities by Islamic extremists and militants in Bangladesh. Till the extremists posed a serious challenge to the authority of the state, she dismissed and turned a deaf ear to newspaper warnings about the danger of spiraling violence by proliferating number of militant groups and their past links with Islami Chatra Shibir, student front of Jamaat test she should alienate the sympathy of her Islamic partners in the government.

The persecution of religious minority specially the Ahmadiya community added no less to suspicions of fundamentalist credentials of the government. The litany of aberrations and failures of five years rule of Khaleda Zia is long and painful.

Yet, BNP came to power for the second time with a resounding

mandate of popular victory. People voted for BNP as an alternative for a change for the better. It was most unfortunate that its leadership opted to fritter away the opportunity, become irresponsible and betray the trust of the people. It lost sight of the lesson of election debacle of Awami League which was punished for not performing.

The welcome change of guards on January 11 as a savior of the nation has removed the darkening shadow of gloom and doom from the horizon of national landscape and has heralded the dawn of hope and promise of a new Bangladesh rooted in "justice and knowledge based society" as is so often reiterated by the chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed.

They cannot and will not fail the expectation of people.

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immense disservice to the nation they did, most unknowingly, do great service instead to compensate their known lapses. Without such an unwittingly displayed contribution the stalwarts of massive corruption, extortion, terrorists, hoodlums etc would not have been behind the bars now.

In the same breath we shall pity these contributors for being trapped in their own snares. Yet for such a generous act on their part towards precipitating a terrible crisis and provoking imposition of emergency rule, the whole nation shall owe them thanks and gratitude. They must be given full credit for preparing the grounds to expose and haul up the corrupt and criminals thriving in their hideous

ahead we shall know how far strategic such declaration of retirement would be. He added that there was no last word in politics and he would welcome the retirement trend as a good omen.

Both Barrister Moudud Ahmed of BNP and Mrs Matia Chowdhury of Awami League opined that there was no alternative to declaration of national emergency. Moudud Ahmed added that if national emergency was not clamped there would have been a terrible head on collision across the country. He was all in praise of the role played by our patriotic armed forces. It was not the forum for him to recollect or reminisce on the fast aggravating situation in the country fanned up by the unholly arrogance displayed by the leaders of the 4-party alliance and its so-called "supremo" on January 22 election.

In would make no difference now if some one belonging to the party in power and a very vocal member of the outgoing government evaded such painful rumination. Yet there shall be many people in the country having little or no connection with politics to felicitate the creators of the crisis paving way to the present national emergency. It may sound a bit preposterous but it is true. Even though the BNP and its partners in the alliance could be accused of

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# On the rouge of retirement and unsolicited contribution

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

THE news was indeed amazing and perhaps a bit tormenting. It came off at such a time when the whole nation has been anxiously awaiting the end result of the corrective interventions of the present caretaker government. It was all about 'retirement' of some of the old-timers from politics. The names suggested included, inter-alia, Mr Anwar Hossain Manju, two former presidents of Bangladesh viz. Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury and HM Ershad. Mr Anwar Hossain Manju gave a telephonic interview to a vernacular daily on Friday March 23, confirming his decision to terminate his political career of three decades. It was also telecast on private channel. He was talking from an unknown place claiming that he took the decision to quit politics all by himself without even discussing with his wife and family members. He expressed his utter frustration with the massive dimension of corruption in the country transcending all limits. Besides, he alluded to his present age as one of the reasons for going into retirement from active politics.

Professor (Dr) Badruddoza Chowdhury was also seen in the electronic media, granting an interview on the same news. He rejected the story as absolutely untrue and motivated. He thought that some vested interests could be behind such a news aimed at creating confusion among his party line-up. He thought that he was very fit both physically and mentally to continue in politics. He claimed too that despite his age he wielded youthful exuberance, clear sense of understanding and analytical brain to make positive contribution to national politics till Allah ordained otherwise.

General Ershad also rejected the news as mere wishful thinking of some people who are used to such fabrication without gaining anything ultimately. He had the firm conviction to be in politics for some more years for making positive contribution to nation-building. He too thought that some mischief mongers were behind such stories aiming to create dissension and frustration among his own partymen.

Between the admixture of apparent truth and apparent lie we have one thing in common and that is, a comparatively new trend in political thinking. We have at least one, single person who had been in the limelight for a substantial period in the national politics and who has opted voluntarily to retire from

Even though the BNP and its partners in the alliance could be accused of immense disservice to the nation they did, most unknowingly, do great service instead to compensate their known lapses. Without such an unwittingly displayed contribution the stalwarts of massive corruption, extortion, terrorists, hoodlums etc would not have been behind the bars now. We shall pity these contributors for being trapped in their own snares. They must be given full credit for preparing the grounds to expose and haul up the corrupt and criminals thriving in their hideous

politics. It is, however, yet to be known how soon such a novel stance shall be effective and, whether or not, despite retirement from active politics, he shall take up some sort of 'honorary' and behind the curtain role to play for his party. As of now and according to his own statement to the news media we shall know that Mr. Anwar Hossain Manju is no more in politics and that he is back to his own core profession of journalism -- the editor of the Daily Ittefaq.

Due to some one's departure from the political scenario of the country there shall not be any significant impact. The typical hum-drum in the arena will very soon automatically consign his memory to oblivion. Newer ones will replace him to fill the temporary void. The only difference that may be palpable around shall be his leadership faculties vis-a-vis others in the row. The ultimate status of his Jatiya Party subsequent to his formal

withdrawal from politics will bear testimony of his personal role in it. It's a matter of time and we will have to wait and see. In the meantime, we may have to note the most pertinent part of his decision which coincides very much with the raid in his Dhanmondi residence by the law enforcing agency couple of weeks ago. They seized nine lakh taka in cash and a number of bottles/cans of foreign liquor. Mr. Hossain evaded arrest because he was not at home during the raid. Later, he obtained order from the Hon'ble High Court against his possible arrest. In spite of that he was not back home till March 23. So, he made a sort of strategic decision, much after he was implicated. His half-hearted endorsement of the role being played by the present caretaker government wouldn't perhaps gather any moss in favour.

Numerous reform programmes initiated by the present caretaker government and in progress now

include, inter alia, one on cleansing the political arena. As an inevitable adjunct to this specific area it would demand banishing the corrupt for a couple of years from being a part of Bangladesh politics. Rules are being framed to forbid bureaucrats from joining politics immediately after their retirement. The proposed inhibition, if implemented eventually, will keep them away at least for three consecutive years. To our utter dismay we may recall in this context that some of the senior officers in the secretariat enjoyed direct patronage of past government to indulge in lobbying for party nomination long before they went on retirement. The politicians who are now behind bars, on charges of large-scale corruption, will be debarred from contesting in any election, national and local, for several years if found guilty and convicted. The restriction could even be effective from the date of expiry of the period of conviction.

In the backdrop of the news on retirement of some of the senior politicians and subsequent confirmation by one of the observations made by two other noted political figures belonging to BNP and Awami League respectively in the Bangladeshi dialogue of BBC on March 24 may draw our attention. Replying to a question of a participant in the dialogue Mr. Moudud Ahmed observed that declaration of such retirement in the present perspective could have been more encouraging if done on some other time. He thought that the doubt or reservation expressed by the audience on the bonafide of the announcement of retirement could not be altogether ignored. Such observation could be construed to have been an oblique and yet unspoken reference to the allegation of corruptions against the retiring politicians. Town planner Professor Nazrul Islam went one step further and remarked that only in days

# Youth shouldn't be blemished with scar of dowry

ASHIT KUMAR SUTRADHAR

YOUTH is the prime time of life. The youth are strong, self confident, creative and productive force of any nation. It is possible to reflect hopes and aspirations of a nation through the youth. Development of a nation is dependent on the spirit and urge for work of the youth.

Dowry means money and/or property that, in some societies, a wife or her family must pay to her husband or his family when they get married. To give and take dowry is now a common practice in our society irrespective of religion. Young men and their parents claim dowry from young women and their parents. The amount of dowry is demanded on the basis of bridegroom's position. The position includes his education, income and property. Monetary value of a young man is determined at the time of his marriage.

The custom of dowry has been in vogue since long. Emperors and kings used to offer portion of their empire or kingdom and valuable assets as dowry to bridegrooms while giving their daughters in marriage. Gradually the common people began to follow this.

In Bangladesh, there are three categories in society from the financial point of view: a) lower class, b) middle class, c) upper class.

In lower class society, dowry is a common phenomenon. The people mostly are poverty ridden and live in rural areas. They have at best a small plot of land for living or are landless. They are day labourers and live from hand to mouth. The young people of this society at their youth are engaged in the bondage of marriage. They need some money to meet expenditure in this connection. Finding no way, the young men or their parents adopt unfair practice of collecting dowry in form of cash, ornaments and other articles. The poor parents of a bride cannot arrange those things easily.

The people of middle class society generally try to establish some sort of social justice and maintain a balance among themselves. They speak of morality, religion and good deeds. They act against social diseases like dowry, early marriage, divorce, discriminations, moral degradation, drug abuse and any illegitimacy. They certainly work for salvation of the society from the curse of dowry but their attempt often turns abortive because they are not always united. The fact is that many of them at the end also agree to dowry only for the benefit of marriage of their daughters/sisters.

Upper class society welcomes dowry because the members appear ready to reward their bridegrooms. They have the ability and don't mind the amount. There often is a competition among rich people "who may be the highest in paying dowry".

Dowry is one kind of poison which is every day spoiling our society. This illegal transaction is enmity in place of good relationship. Giving and taking of dowry creates an artificial friendship for a moment but in the long run it breaks down. Dowry is hampering normal life without any good effect. But bad effects of dowry are so many:

a. Dowry causes violence against young women irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

b. Dowry makes innocent young women victims of physical torture, murder, acid attack and other violations.

c. Greed for dowry makes a man brute which is most harmful for a smooth family and social life.

d. Dowry turns the poor poorer.

e. Dowry gives birth to dishonesty, inhumanity, enmity and discrimination among young people.

f. Dowry is an obstacle to fair conjugal life.

g. Dowry demolishes morality of new generation.

h. Dowry is the source of discord and misery.

To abolish the system of dowry the government has introduced some programmes. The first one is motivation.

The second one is Dowry Prevention Law. Government passed this law in 1980 and amended it in 2003. According to this law, to give and take dowry is a punishable offence. Under this law, a person involved in transaction of dowry shall be given punishment of one year's imprisonment or fine of Tk. 5000/- (five thousand) or both.

Government has formulated National Youth Policy. In this policy responsibilities of youth have been defined. Their two important responsibilities are "to have respect on national unity, social solidarity, general consensus, tolerance and law and order" and "to play pivotal role in creating a wealthy society free from terrorism, social injustice, exploitation, corruption and crime".

But, still our society is too weak to root out the scourge. To fight the well rooted dowry system the following proposals are made specially for the youth to consider.

**Moral education for young people:** This can teach young people how to treat life and what good and bad principles are. It can also teach both parents and youths that men and women are equal and one should respect another. Moral education can keep young people away from the curse of dowry. It gives us a good lesson that marriage is not buying and selling of young men and women. Marriage is a lifelong bondage of two persons and dowry is irrelevant to this bondage.

**Empowerment of young women:** For empowerment of young women, their 50 percent participation in education, employment, social services, politics, and all other productive activities must be ensured. This will make the young women self-reliant and their self-reliance will work as one of the factors in declining the influence of dowry. For young women special programme on education, training, and other supports is most needed. Social security for them is a must.

**Capital punishment:** For eradication of dowry, government has fixed punishment for persons concerned. Punishment should be higher. For threat of capital punishment young