

Leadership crisis in Bangladesh

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WE have just celebrated our 36th Independence Anniversary. Our cricket team has given the country an Independence Day gift in the guise of moving into the Super-eight stage of the ICC World Cup. What have our leaders given us on this auspicious day? During the last 36 years, we had leaders who had almost unflinching support of the people to carry out their programme for the development of the country. Instead we are in such a mess that special measures had to be taken to put things right. We had five leaders who have steered the nation so far. They are Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ziaur Rahman, Hussain Mohammad Ershad, Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. They have put their indelible mark on the body politic of Bangladesh. But what are those marks? How much do they inspire us? How much can we learn from them? Can they be our idols?

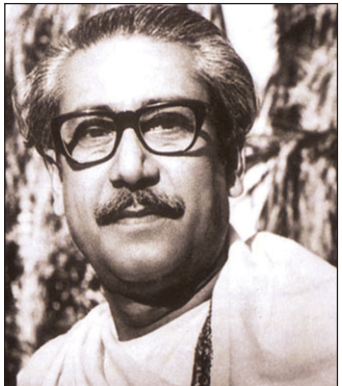
Leaders of nations have much more responsibility than any other type of leader. First of all, every leader must have some important character qualities, which are: honesty, truthfulness, contentment and humility. Leaders of nations have to motivate their people and their nation, inspire them, infuse confidence into them, and generate

in them a spirit and urge to perform. This a leader can achieve through personal examples. A nation must see the leader perform up front. Only then will the people be prepared to follow him/her because of sheer respect and esteem for the leader.

Another aspect of the national leader's quality is to understand the environment with all its intricacies in which he/she is working. Once the leader has taken grasp of the environment he/she should select the team with whom the leader will work. A leader must evaluate the tasks ahead, prioritize them and then evolve strategies for addressing them. Now the leader has to explain his/her policy to the nation and then carry them along to accomplish the task that he/she has set.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman earned the title of "Bangabandhu" for championing the cause of the people of East Pakistan for autonomy leading to independence. It is an irony that a leader, who underwent immense sufferings for the establishment and functioning of the democratic institutions, undermined those institutions during his tenure. A person who fought all his life for the establishment of parliamentary democratic system abolished multi-party democracy and set up one party rule. He attained such a towering personality that he started adopting paternalistic approach to all problems. This

particular tendency of Bangabandhu allowed the sycophants to gather around him and his relatives to gain more power than anybody else in the government or the party. This led to the feelings that he was not only set on authoritarian rule but was trying to set an authoritarian dynastic system.



Major General Ziaur Rahman entered upon the political stage of Bangladesh at a very difficult time when the country was passing through political turmoil. Zia's honesty was never questioned. His charismatic personality, his message of hope, his enthusiasm and boundless energy attracted average Bangladeshis towards his policies and programme. He probably saw more of Bangladesh on his travels across the country than any other leader, past or present.

Although Zia was catapulted to power through coup and counter coups, yet it was he, who reintroduced the multi-party democracy in the country. President Ziaur Rahman was honest to a fault, but he could not imbibe his cabinet ministers with the same spirit to follow him. Zia did what Mujib was unable to do - move the nation's



economy and restore the country's infrastructure.

Lieutenant General Hossain Mohammad Ershad usurped power and like other military dictators turned into a politician. Although Ershad ruled for eight and half years, he could not make any impact on the youth of the nation. Unlike his mentor Zia, he suffered from dents in his personal image. During his tenure the country moved forward economically and a base for further eco-

nomics development was made. He handled the flood situation very effectively, brought in some major changes in the country's administrative systems. But it was his autocratic and oppressive measures, and his personal character that tainted his image.

After the inglorious departure of Ershad, it was the Begums who



ruled this country for 16 long years. The people expected that here were two ladies, who had undergone the hardships of the autocratic rule, and would usher in democratic culture and build a sound leadership chain. But that was not to be. Instead, what the country got was a culture of obstinacy, unyielding and uncompromising attitudes. The Begums of the two largest parties can take maximum credit for that; one taking front seat of the party after

her father's death in a military coup and the other bearing the fruits of her husband's death in another military coup. Both the leaders started off as best buddies to overthrow the 'bad guy'. But once that happened and they pitched themselves against each other in the election field, the relationship turned sour to the



extent where all sense of civility and courtesy were thrown out of window. These two leaders have set the worst examples of leadership qualities. They developed such hatred against each other that they would not talk to each other or give a polite nod even for the media. There is nothing of these two Begums that can be emulated by the people.

Sheikh Hasina has gone on a sojourn to the USA to see her grandchild, while Begum Khaleda

Zia has gone into seclusion after her son was taken into custody. Hasina has a tendency to visit USA now and then to see her children and grandchildren. If she prolongs her stay there and Begum Zia also prolongs her seclusion, the political climate of the country will get better. Along with these ladies, there are other



leaders for whom it is the right time to say goodbye to politics. Let the torch be passed to the next generation of leaders.

During the last 36 years there has been very little vertical movement of the leaders. There has been a rush of horizontal entry into the political arena. Bureaucrats, both civil and military, businessmen and unscrupulous people with muscle power made their way into politics. To them nothing was unethical or dishonest, whether

flattering, wheedling or bribing, to get their job done.

The leader in every party is viewed as a symbol of totality and is given patriarchal and autocratic power. There have hardly been any democratic norms followed in the parties. Later, the two major political parties were in the process of bringing dynastic politics into our political culture. It is time that these tendencies in our political culture are curbed.

I suggest that some form of check should be imposed on the political parties about their functioning. There can be a clause somewhere so that no one individual can continue to be the leader of a party for more than 10 years, or no one can be prime minister for more than two terms. The present generation of our leaders has had their day; it is now time for a new generation to take their place. This replacement has to be done democratically. No party leader should be allowed to take over the leadership without going through the normal democratic process. There is massive optimism in the air; people are regaining trust in the ability of the government, and the masses are finding opportunity to contribute to the development of the country. Let us not spill this precious opportunity to make Bangladesh a democratic nation worth its name.

The author is a freelancer.

US-Bangladesh strategic alliance

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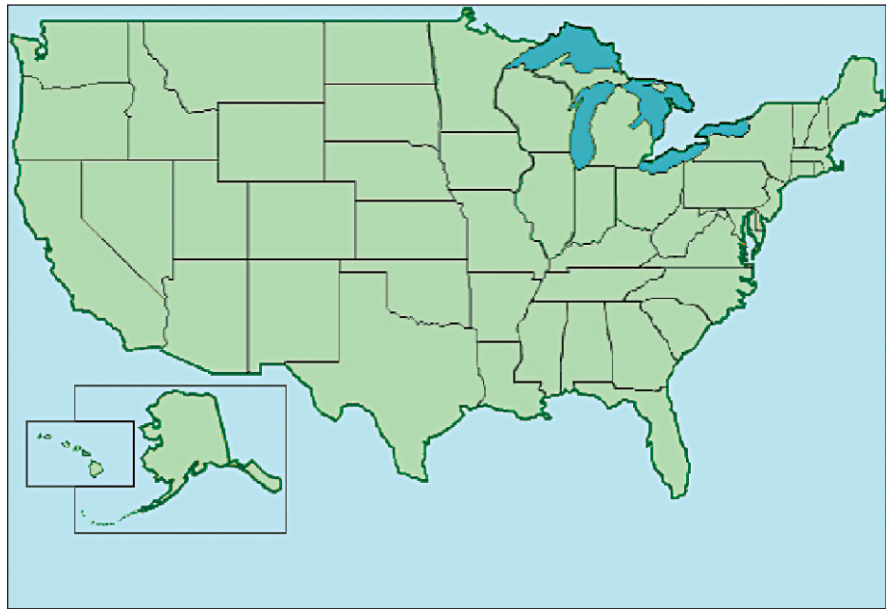
BANGLADESH has so many positive things, but unfortunately, the US does not have any strategic relation with the country said the US Congressman Curt Weldon in his recent visit to Bangladesh. He also rightly observed that the overarching relationship of US with India and Pakistan has shadowed the potentials of Bangladesh. Bangladesh should be eager for strategic alliance with the USA but lack resources to penetrate the Beltway Washington.

We are glad to hear it from a congressional representative; he should say it louder in Washington. A country in immediate proximity of two awaking giants and fast moving Asia, Bangladesh is on a new definition of assertive strategy. As the voice of the people is increasingly reflected in this part of the world, we need assent of the people to sustain long-term cooperation. The easiest way is through trade that will anchor popular support. We are hungry for jobs; US has a serious worry of labour cost at home. If American technology and entrepreneurship can combine with 140 million working hands, it is going to be a strategic coupling spreading to other fields.

If futurologists are right, China-card is finally taking a U-turn as future challenger. Recent imposition of penal tariff on Chinese imports is a visible sign of trade friction. A wise management of economic strategy is to have multiple sources of smaller trade line to the US market. With concentration on technology driven ventures, America has lesser appeal for labour incentive industries like garments, apparels, shoes, steel, IT, electronics etc. Once the granary of the world

and blast furnace of industrial production, the lucrative American market has attracted many friends and allies who have gained through it. It will be suicidal for America not to give attention to the innovative technology. To be on the driving seat of the globe, America must concentrate on high yielding state-of-the-art technology and remain competitive in the labour incentive areas as well by opening production line in countries like Bangladesh. It is not outsourcing jobs. America can very much wrestle back control of the jobs that they have already lost to competitors by opening production and assembly lines in pro-labour Bangladesh. People have minimum knowledge of English and are eager to learn; Bangladesh is a huge reservoir of low cost labour force. The booming garment industry shows that it really works. If businesses of other countries can take advantage of cheap labour force of Bangladesh, aggressive American entrepreneurs can do it better for their home market. Joint ventures can take care of the local culture. The American Business Chamber in Dhaka can be the right instigator.

Bangladesh has only meager resources to impress the world: people like Congressman Weldon can spread the message. Americans had their 'gold rush', they have the black gold; with labour incentive production lines in Bangladesh they can have their 'labour gold' too. I wish somebody told them point-blank that there is a lot of money in Bangladesh. As incentive, Bangladesh government can underwrite security of the investments for first hundred investors with a thousand plus employment opportunity. Americans love money - to earn and to spend. America is the largest market of



the goods and services that Bangladesh produces. We have export promotion zones; likewise we can also have some exclusive 'American Export Promotion Zones'.

The people of Bangladesh are a fine homogenous stock. The word on the street rightly speaks we cannot be away from democracy and Human Rights. The present anti-graft and anti-terror initiative is to free democracy and market economy from the parasites. With the law coming down hard on the terrorist outfits, militancy is already on a nosedive, the climate of peace and progress for profitable business is



set. The World Bank predicts we shall have over 7% growth next year. Value added pluralistic alliance is the best bet. A new era of optimism is starting, and joining of American entrepreneurs with Bangladesh labour force at this time is an all win situation.

In spite of having the smallest per capita armed forces (Population - armed forces ratio) in the world, we are the largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping force. The third world is restive, its many borders insecure; Bangladesh is an ideal country to raise some UN standing force for policing needs of the world. Movement

of naval fleet of big and powerful stature draws too much attention; in many cases it rings the alarm bell. Given the right incentive, Bangladesh naval forces, along with Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, can police Bay of Bengal waters up to the choke point of Malacca Strait. American military hardware is replaced every twenty years. If some of these replaced hardware are offered to Bangladesh at an affordable price, we shall have stronger response towards world peace.

Erstwhile JMB was more of an amateurish venture compared to the cold-blooded extrem-

ism witnessed in Afghanistan and Iraq. We thank the outfit for blasting over four hundred odd crackers that shed little blood but invited the inevitable axe. We are a liberal society. In spite of deprivations, hardboiled extremism is not in our chemistry. Anybody who deals with Bangladesh must understand the conflicting requirements between today's expediency and yesterday's legacies ingrained in the psychic. Pakistanis tried to exploit the people of Bangladesh for simple religious beliefs that served as catalyst for the creation of Pakistan. The wheels of progress will shut the vulnerable window forever and walk Bangladesh out of the miserable trap to more substance than mere hollow slogans.

It is time to repair the damages following 9/11. A major weakness of US policy towards Muslims is lack of popular response. A pro-people strategy in Bangladesh can be a turning point in the much-misunderstood Muslim world. Poverty reduction and population control is already working as a beacon for many third world countries; extremism and corruption weeded out for growth of democracy and market economy; Bangladesh needs real-term encouragement for a quantum leap towards global integration. Buy or sell, business will benefit both ends. A nondescript Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton once thundered 'It's the economy stupid' that made him the president of the United States; I shall repeat his strategy by saying 'It's the business gentlemen; take it to Bangladesh'.

The author is a free lancer.

Emerging new security alliance in Asia Pacific

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

FOR some time, Japan is concerned with the rise of China, and North Korea's nuclear programme and is moving to abandon its post-war pacifist constitution. Japan wants to reassert its status that comes with being the world's second largest economy.

The US is a long-time ally of Japan and has security relationship with Japan and South Korea. American troops are stationed in both countries.

With the rise of China's military and economic power, the US, being the only super power reigning supreme in the region, is concerned that the balance of security relationship in the Asia-Pacific may get disturbed. In political and security term, there is no zero sum game. One rises and the other falls. That is the verdict of history.

Australia wants Japan playing bigger role in Asia's economic and security architecture. Australia's Prime Minister Howard is a fellow traveler with the more assertive Japan symbolized by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and the incumbent Shinzo Abe. Australian troops in Iraq were protecting Japanese engineers, a proof of their strong bilateral relationship.

Both the US and Japan want to extend their security alliance with other countries; Australia under the conservative government is a willing partner. Last March Japan and Australia signed a new security agreement that reflects a strategic

evolution in both nations.

The trilateral security alliance or arrangements (US, Japan and Australia) is a matter of importance no one can miss. Nobody should have any illusions about the consequences in the Asia-Pacific region.

This trilateral security arrangement fits in with Vice President Cheney's strategic plan to close the backdoor on China. To allay China's concern, Australia said that the security arrangement was not designed with China in mind.

Is India joining the security arrangement?

The arrangement between Japan, the US and Australia is the platform for further expansion with other countries and India appears to be one of them. There is a reported news that Japan and the US are keen to expand this trilateral security arrangement with India. This means the trilateral security arrangements would turn into a "quadrilateral" arrangement between Japan, US, Australia and India.

India's military power, economic growth and geographic position would significantly offset China's emerging power, which is of concern to many in the Bush administration. The US is keen to see an understanding between the four democracies (India, Japan, Australia and the US) surrounding China. The Bush administration thinks that it would effectively contain China. The question is whether India will agree to join the loop with three other countries.

Many think that India would not enter into a formal security arrange-

ment against China for the following reasons:

First, such arrangement may tarnish the image of India as being a non-aligned country among developing countries and its role in regional and global affairs will be adversely affected. Furthermore India is contesting a seat of non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2010.

Secondly, the alliance makes it difficult for India to pretend that growing web of alliances between Australia, Japan, the US and India is not about keeping China in a military box. Such arrangement may unnecessarily create tension with China at a time when both countries are deeply engaged in strengthening economic cooperation and India's target for bilateral trade with China is aimed at nearly \$30 billion by 2010.

Thirdly, both nations want a stable relationship for their economic growth, as both countries have to address poverty alleviation in the countryside. Although both countries are having more than 8 to 9 percent annual economic growth, there is a wide disparity of income between the urban and countryside population. Such inequitable distribution of income among segments in the community poses a threat to its stability and security.

Fourthly, while India has become close to the US as its strategic partner, India does not always follow US's bidding. For example, the US is against India's proposed gas deal with Iran but India, for its national interest, continues to pursue the deal

with Iran.

Conclusion

It is correct to say that a new realignment of forces is shaping in the Asia Pacific region, but the prospect of an understanding between the US, Japan and Australia surrounding China is likely to be viewed differently by various states in the region. Beijing is already accusing the US of attempting to contain its growth and influence.

Another important dimension is that China has been an importer of raw materials from Australia and Australia's economy largely depends on its exports to China. The Leader of the Opposition in Australia (head of the Labour Party) already signaled that this party would oppose any steps to contain China.

Furthermore, Australia says it is not a security or defence pact. The purpose of such security arrangement, Australia claims, is its common involvement in the war against terror, counter-proliferation initiatives and peacekeeping operations in keeping the sea-lanes secure and safe.

One should also not ignore that China, the US and Australia share common ground on the issue of Islamic fundamentalism. Against this background, it is important to avoid black-white thinking in so far as the new-alignment of security arrangements in the Far East. Let us wait and see whether an "Eastern NATO" is formed against China.

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India's response to bio-terrorism

AJEY LELE

MAJOR catastrophes - earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and plagues - have brought several early civilizations to their knees. Today, these natural forces are being supplemented by terrorism. Especially after 9/11, tackling terrorism has become part of the main agenda of several nation-states. Unfortunately, they are still unprepared to handle the situation arising out of unconventional attacks such as by terrorist organizations using radiological, chemical or biological weapons.

Countries like India, which have been tackling the menace of terrorism for many years fall into the same category. In the Indian context threats like bio-terrorism have become stronger in the last few years. This is mainly because of the changing nature of terrorism. Today, terrorists are on the lookout for adopting new tools and tactics for spreading terror. On the other hand, India has made significant progress in biotechnology over the last few years and this has increased the 'easy availability' of material and knowledge to undertake acts of bio-terror.

Regrettably, most of the safety initiatives undertaken by the government, academic and private biological research communities within the country, concentrate mainly only on 'laboratory bio-safety and security', leaving open

opportunities for theft, sabotage and/or transfer of knowledge/technology that could help a terrorist organization to launch such an attack. Also, there is a lack of adequate mechanisms to deal with the post-attack scenario, particularly in respect of maintaining a command and control center.

Against this backdrop, the recent initiative by the government to deal with bio-terrorism by formulating standard operating procedures (SOPs) to handle the post-attack scenario is a welcome step. According to newspaper reports (Financial Express, 28 March 2007), the Government of India has finally approved a model SOP to handle any eventuality arising out of a bio-terror attack. It has been mentioned that this SOP contains the processes to deal with terrorist attacks using biological agents to cause diseases like anthrax, plague, botulism and cholera.

The overall responsibility for addressing these threats lays with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), which is tasked to lay down the command, control and preparedness measures. The Ministry of Health would play a pivotal role in this initiative identifying suitable laboratories and devising a policy for procuring, manufacturing and stockpiling relevant vaccines and drugs. Appropriate protocol for their validation/certification, contamination testing at source of

water supply would also be developed as effective Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) will be established at the district level.

This initiative is likely to be financed by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) while a separate team would be constituted to do the groundwork. The agencies involved would be the National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS) in consultation with the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), MHA and Ministry of Health. The 'model' developed by this team would be tested in the national capital and subsequently passed on to other states in the country.

This initiative appears to have brought together various other ad hoc schemes undertaken till date. During January 2004 it was reported that the MHA had started a process of deploying an elite force - comprising four battalions of central paramilitary forces - to counter biological, chemical and radioactive attacks. These four battalions are expected to function as a national disaster response force. It has also been mentioned that the primary responsibility for dealing with such situations will lie with the state governments.

However, some questions remain unanswered. During 2001, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had created a cell to tackle

bio-terrorism. This core group was expected to review and assess the information available on the activities of various terrorist groups. This group, which is essentially 'proactive' in nature, had also a 'reactive element', to carry out bio-disaster management. It is not known what role this group would now play in this new initiative.

Another interesting aspect of this report is that even though the involvement of the Health Ministry is mentioned there is no specific reference to role of Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) which till date was known to be the disaster nodal organization for biological disasters in the overall disaster management plan of the country.

It needs to be understood that the biological disasters require a holistic response. This is because 'germ-spreading' knows no geographical boundaries. Bio-disasters demand different responses and cannot be treated only as a 'medical' or 'policing' activity. Any confusion or lack of clarity within SOPs will have disastrous impact on the overall health of the country, both physical and economic. It is hoped that these SOPs remove all obscurities and rise above the usual gimmicks of center-state relationships and the turf-wars played out amongst various intelligence agencies.

By arrangement with IPCS.