

Another Muslim killed by Muslim extremists

Can democracy function in a country like Pakistan where extremist Muslims are carrying out mass murder of fellow Muslims who don't share their vision of a mythical pure Islamic society? The answer may be a qualified no. Unless Pakistanis can find a way to stand up against the Taliban, al-Qaeda and their fanatical acolytes, and not provide them with moral support, democracy will not be able to function.

MAHMOOD ELAHI

EVER since her return to Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto had been a target of opportunity for Muslim extremists belonging to Al Qaeda, Taliban and assorted group of Muslim extremists. Being an educated and liberal-minded woman, she was most hated by these Muslim extremists and they declared a war against her even before her arrival. For them, a woman as head of government is totally unacceptable.

But the murder of Benazir Bhutto is only symptomatic of larger mass murders carried out by extremists in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other Muslim countries. In Pakistan, al-Qaeda and its Taliban surrogates have been carrying out regular suicide bombings, killing ordinary Pakistanis in the name of Islam.

Only a week before Bhutto's assassination, they carry out a bloody suicide bombing during Eid-ul-Azha in a mosque, killing and injuring scores of ordinary Pakistanis.

Considering that ordinary Muslims are being killed by these terrorist groups, it is surprising that the Taliban and al-Qaeda remain highly popular in many parts of Pakistan. This may be case of a larger what is called Stockholm Syndrome in which the victims feel sympathetic towards their tormentors and believe in a scapegoat provided by their oppressors.

The Taliban and al-Qaeda are killing fellow Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan (and Iraq) while blaming it on the Americans. As Daily Times columnist Khaled Ahmed wrote: "In Sudan and Somalia, Muslims are killing

Muslims. In Afghanistan Muslims killed Muslims in the civil war before the world moved in with daisy-cutters with a UN legal cover. In Pakistan, Muslims kill Muslims then blame it on India ... Muslims have learnt to kill [Muslims] in many ways. When convenient, they blame it on America and India."

With such a ready-made scapegoat available, it is not surprising that the Taliban and al-Qaeda can carry out mass murders of fellow Muslims and still retain their popularity. In Iraq, the Sunni extremists have been systematically slaughtering their fellow Shiite Muslims. They have bombed Shia mosques filled with worshippers. They have bombed Shiite schools and hospitals, killing women and children. In 2006, they destroyed the Golden Mosque at Samarra, one of holiest Shiite shrines -- all the while blaming it on the Americans.

Benazir Bhutto is only one, albeit the most famous, of many

ing the Americans.

In Palestine, Hamas, which won the election, has been brutalising its rival Fatah while blaming the Israelis for their misfortune. During recent fighting for Gaza, Hamas was accused by Human Rights Watch of "violations international humanitarian law, in some cases amounting to war crimes." According to Human Rights Watch: "Hamas military forces captured 28-year-old Muhammad Swairki, a cook for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's presidential guards, and executed him by throwing him to his death, with his hands and legs tied, from a 15-story apartment building in the Gaza City."

The unspeakable brutality of Hamas toward fellow Palestinians stands in stark contrast with the moderation it has shown to kidnapped BBC journalist Allan Johnston by arranging his release. Why Hamas showed no mercy to Muhammad Swairki, a poor Palestinian cook? The answer may be that Hamas has no sympathy with a fellow Palestinian who doesn't share its vision.

In Iran, the ruling Shiite mullahs are regularly slaughtering fellow Iranians who don't share their vision of Shia Islam. Iranian writer Azar Nafisi tells us about the brutality of Shiite mullahs in her book Reading Lolita in Tehran. Her story of Iran is a struggle for survival in a country where Shiite mullahs regularly "hang people in the streets," -- a country where educated women are viewed as enemies of the state. If Benazir were an Iranian leader, she would have met the same fate in the hands of extremist Muslims.

This leads us to the question: Can democracy function in a country like Pakistan where extremist Muslims are carrying out mass murder of fellow Muslims who don't share their vision of a mythical pure Islamic society? The answer may be a qualified no. Unless Pakistanis can find a way to stand up against the Taliban, al-Qaeda and their fanatical acolytes, and not provide them with moral support, democracy will not be able to function.

Look at how Hamas, which won the election, is brutalising fellow Palestinians who support the rival Fatah. Democracy cannot function if the people are filled with hatred and extremists can continue to systematically murder those they consider as heretics and deserve to be killed.

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Benazir's family mourns killing of another Bhutto.

bring any change.

victims of al-Qaeda and the Taliban who have turned Pakistan into a veritable Terroristan. Unless they are contained, election will not

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Second generation NRBS: Untapped resource



AYUB KOROM ALI

DHAKA witnessed one of the biggest gathering of NRB professionals at Hotel Sheraton over the past three days. The three day event that commenced Thursday and ended yesterday is organised by a not for profit organisation, Scholars Bangladesh, with the support of the government.

The organisers want to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the NRBS living in different part of the world. But more importantly they want talented NRBS to come and use their talents in the development of their mother country. This is a timely initiative and the organisers deserved to be congratulated. Judging by the number of people who attended the inaugural session the conference promises to be a resounding success.

I am a non-resident Bangladeshi living in the UK. The UK has a large

and growing Bangladeshi population, estimated to be around 400,000. It is a young population and the vast majority of the present British Bangladeshi are born and brought up in the UK.

Economically, Bangladesh has benefited greatly from the presence of Bangladeshis in the UK. In the past, the UK Bangladeshis have sent large remittances to support their relatives in Bangladesh. But more recently economically more prosperous ones have started to invest here too in commerce and industries. I am told that British Bangladeshis are now the biggest investors in Bangladesh. Naturally the government wants more British Bangladeshis to come and invest here and why not? The investment climate here is much more favourable and if my fellow British NRBS can make more money by investing here, I am all for it.

However, what government ministers and policy makers in

Bangladesh failed to notice is that the British Bangladeshis have much more to offer than just cash. In the last decade, with the emergence of the second generation, the British Bangladeshi community has grown a big reservoir of human resources. It is estimated that there are around 30,000 British Bangladeshi graduates. The number is increasing every year approximately by 3-4,000. Among these there are people with expertise and skills in most professional areas.

The government needs to utilise the skills and talents of these NRBS in the development of the country. The second generation British Bangladeshis can be a force for good in Bangladesh, and, if utilised effectively, can introduce a dynamism and energy that is badly needed in the country.

The question is what needs to be done and how can this group be enticed to consider Bangladesh as a destination for the investment of their professional skills?

The first thing to recognise here is that there is a lot of interest and good will out there to get involved. I know this from my own experience. I spent three years managing a European funded project in Sylhet focusing on Urban Environmental Management. Though very challenging, I found the experience one of the most rewarding periods of my professional career. Given the same option, I know many second generation Bangladeshis who would jump at the opportunity.

However, the skilled and the talented will not come here for the love of the country. They will ask for appropriate remunerations.

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Resident or non-resident?

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

RECENTLY, in Delhi, as a Delhiite historian friend was showing me a historical site, she said the architect of that monument was from Persia. I shot back, saying: "He must have been the first NRI, Non-resident Iranian, I mean."

Professor Atish Dipankar was a non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) who went all the way to Tibet after a stint in Malaysia to teach in the early 11th century. He returned home nine centuries later in a coffin in an independent Bangladesh.

Globalisation has many casualties. The title of an interesting book on telecommunication generated globalisation is: *The Death of Distance* (Frances Cairncross, 1997). In addition to distance and to some extent, time, NRB or NRI, or whatever, too is becoming a casualty of globalisation.

Who is a resident and who is a non-resident has been blurred by globalisation. Once someone asked Professor Saskia Sassen, a prominent author on the subject of globalisation, where she lived.

She answered: "While not on a plane, I live in Chicago." Like Sassen, now at Columbia University, New York, many in this globalised world have become footloose, unanchored.

While Channel i news showed a clip of NRB conference in Dhaka recently, the news featured four speakers: Dr. Atir Rahman, Dr. Kamal Hossain, Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, and Professor Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury as speakers of various sessions. For

those who live in Bangladesh, these are familiar faces and names. For me, though I do not live in Bangladesh these days, these are familiar names as well.

Dr. Atir Rahman is an economist, or more appropriately, a famous socio-economist, an NGO activist, a columnist, a powerful writer in Bangla. Dr. Kamal Hossain, an internationally famed jurist, one of the founding members of Transparency International, former law and foreign minister of Bangladesh and close confidant of Bangabandhu. He studied economics at University of Michigan before returning to do Ph.D. in law at Oxford. Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury a brilliant engineering professor, now vice-chancellor of Brac University, also served as an adviser to the caretaker government. Professor Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury, a sociologist Ph.D. from Aberdeen University, Scotland, is currently the vice-chancellor of Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB).

These four individuals are not only wonderful human beings and scholars of distinction, they are in one sense NRBs too. They all went and spent time overseas. But they also returned to their base quietly without the glare and glory of NRBs. They were potential NRBs. In fact, many in Bangladesh who helped place Bangladesh on the global map in a favourable light are NRBs except they were not called as such.

Professor Muhammad Yunus and Mr. Fazle Hasan Abed are the two names that spring to mind. Professor Yunus did teach at a US university before heading back to Chittagong University. Mr. Abed returned to Bangladesh after the liberation of Bangladesh. Both of them worked for the liberation of Bangladesh while they were away in US and UK, respectively.

The editor of the newspaper you are reading left a cushy job with Unesco (imagine all the great postings in Paris, New York, Bangkok, and the perks) and returned to Dhaka where one of the avocations of a journalist has become facing baseless law suits or threats. And there are other young journalists who left promising overseas careers (even legal career in US) to return to Bangladesh. They were not targeted by any government department. They did it on their own. Let's say that they missed home-cooked food.

One young woman who shares my last name (but unrelated) was teaching in a college in US. One day she saw the college president to tell him that she was quitting to return to Dhaka. The president could not believe it, but she meant what she had said. I can give a long list of people who could break the temptation of overseas living and returned home.

Others stayed but their hearts were in Bangladesh, their bodies were overseas. As globalisation deepens, people will live in multiple localities. And they will have multiple jobs. A friend of mine, a Kolkata-born economist educated in US has worked his way up to be a professor in a mid-sized US university and now helping set up a private university in Bangladesh (Chittagong) using his experience of setting up one in Venezuela.

The life of Mr. Carlos Ghosn who is an NRB (non-resident Brazilian) illustrates the point most eloquently. He is the CEO of Renault, which he turned from a loss-making to a profit-making company. His reputation spread. He was hired by Nissan as CEO but he did not quit his French job. He is CEO of two companies in two different parts of the world at the same time and spends a lot of time commuting between Paris and Tokyo.

In the mid 1990s, I knew some promising Indians who had fabulous jobs in banks and other private sectors in Singapore, but had returned to India. Yes, the Indian government was supportive, but they were allured by the new opportunities in India following the economic reforms. I tracked one such family who lived very well in Singapore, but now live in opulence in a posh New Delhi suburb.

I know one NRB who left a high paying teaching job in Brunel and returned to Dhaka, but after a while one fine morning, he packed his stuff and headed for a new destination. He teaches in an Australian university now. I know another academic who very much wanted to live in Australia but Australia would not keep him. He found his way to Dhaka via Singapore to a private university. And eventually moved back to Canada. In a globalised world, we are all NRBs as we are all non-NRBs. The so-called creative class, as Richard Florida calls them, has become footloose. And globalisation is going to make it more so.

The world is our oyster.

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Reforms and election

Z. A. KHAN

THE political history of the South Asian subcontinent is fairly old and eventful. In fact, formal organisational politics in South Asia started with the formation of the Indian Congress in 1885. The Muslims of India emerged as a separate political entity with the formation of Muslim League about a hundred years back. It is, indeed, a shame for our politicians that we failed to provide truly democratic politics to our people despite having a long political past. The political bankruptcy that we now encounter is the legacy of negligence, disregard, and the feudalistic attitude of our leaders over the years.

The major political parties BNP and AL have now reached a critical juncture, where their future seems bleak because of the people's disenchantment with the high-handedness of their leaders. Although both these parties had been able to steer away from unmanageable political crises in the past, it seems quite an uphill task this time around, as our people want to see the political parties bring about some qualitative change in the political culture.

There have been a few changes of the guard since August 1975, and people have settled down with

the change. But this time insularity ruled the roost in the political landscape, which gave way to violence that threatened to snowball into civil strife had not the government proclaimed state of emergency on January 11.

The situation after the caretaker government under Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed took over and promised holding of free and fair election on a level playing field is gradually settling down after a few initial lightning acts to assure the people that "zero tolerance" would be shown towards perpetrators of activities considered derogatory to the people's interest and country's security concerns.

In a unique demonstration of resolution to stamp out corruption and abuse of power, the CTG has arrested the top suspects, including two former prime ministers, which is a rare example. People at large heaved a sigh of relief and regained the lost hope of a democracy which would be of the people, by the people and for the people.

Assessing the mood of the people, Dr. Iajuddin decided step down as the chief of CTG and sought armed forces help to

impose a state of emergency, to which call our patriotic forces responded positively and a new CTG was formed with Dr. Fakhruddin at its helm.

A lot of criticism is being heard in the TV talk shows, and written in the newspapers, about the performance of the CTG, especially its involvement in areas that were not related to holding of free and fair election. The CTG took over with the promise of holding a free election, and removing any impediments to that, so that we could say that the election was indeed a fair one. Corruption, abuse of power, undemocratic practices in the political parties, their strong arm policy, kleptocracy, and "familicracy" (if you like) were the practice of the trade. Once the CTG started to act to correct these criticisms increased. Why so much criticism by a handful of political people? Well, the answer is not inconceivable.

Three elections were held under CTGs, but whoever lost the election alleged that it was rigged. It is true that 100% transparency and neutrality could not be maintained, but the elections were largely acceptable. In a developing country like ours, because of socio-economic situations and age old political practices, there can be some mistakes and a certain degree of partisanship. In most of

the democratic countries, elections are held at the end of a fixed tenure by a CTG formed by the same government.

One could ask why we have to have a CTG formed by people other than those who were in the immediate past government? Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that there must be some lacunae in our brand of democracy, and till they are removed we cannot expect to see a truly free and fair election.

Even though the governments were elected democratically since 1990, they failed to ensure good governance, a certain level of development, tolerance toward the opposition, and welfare of the people. BNP and AL who were in the government or in the opposition in the last fifteen years put party above nation and propelled a personality cult.

The other damaging element of 15 years of misrule bred the belief that regime security was more important than state security, in other words the intelligence apparatus of the state was employed for political party's interest. So state security was relegated, which enabled the political leaders to commit all sorts of immoral and undemocratic acts with impunity. Those who amassed huge fortune by plundering state wealth are opposing reforms of any sort, fearing that if reforms were brought about then they would be dispatched into oblivion. One of the reasons for deviating from the path of democracy is that undemocratic corporate bosses had been allowed to join politics in large numbers and became beneficiaries of the party and they, in their turn, gratified those who doled out favours to them.

Democracy means good governance. Abuse of power, oppression of the opposition and corruption are contrary to good governance. Our top position in the list of most corrupt nations in the world for five consecutive years brought us immense shame. I feel our concern to stamp out corruption should receive priority over holding election. Even though the election process was corrupted to a large extent, so unless corruption is removed even the election will not show the true desire of the voters. We should admit that CTG has planned its priority of actions wisely and engaged itself with commitment to gradually cleanse the society and state apparatus of corruption and abuse of power. Those who amassed huge fortune by plundering state wealth are opposing reforms of any sort, fearing that if reforms were brought about then they would be dispatched into oblivion. One of the reasons for deviating from the path of democracy is that undemocratic corporate bosses had been allowed to join politics in large numbers and became beneficiaries of the party and they, in their turn, gratified those who doled out favours to them. It is imperative that political parties tailor-make their parties' policies and "modus operandi" to evoke trust and confidence of the people. Now that most of the top notch politicians have been exposed and the futility of an undemocratic party constitution understood, there is the need for democratic party constitutions. We should get rid of ill motivated politicians and, at the same time, plug the possible holes to prevent corruption in EC, PSC, ACC, and judiciary.

Some of the politicians who believe that major reforms are necessary got together and declared their resolve to work for reform before next election so that only those politicians who are committed to the welfare of the country and the people remain in politics. While the nation should have felt elated at the prospect of some positive reform taking place, the reformists received resistance from the beneficiaries of the past governments. These people even castigated the proponents of reforms. What a shame for the nation!

There is no denying that whenever reforms are talked about one would assume that it is primarily the reform of the political culture and character of the politicians. BNP and AL are the two largest parties, and were in the government and in opposition, so naturally one would expect them to start the reforms. While AL leadership was amenable to reforms, BNP

showed total disinterest, fearing a backlash. I wonder why one would miss an opportunity to change oneself, even if the past has been shoddy. Let us not forget that confession helps to redeem sin.

While arrogance is a dampener in carrying out reform for a better future for all, a weak approach is meaningless and a non-starter. So one should not wait to see a rapprochement of sorts between the reformers and the beneficiaries of the past politics. The aim of reform is to right the wrongs that made our future bleak. If there is convergence of reform initiatives among political parties or government, that should not be taken as marriage of interest but a wedding of reforms for a better future of our nation. It will not be a remote possibility if we work with unremitting commitment.

The government and political parties should put their acts together to get the people to rise above all kinds of partisanship to give our nation a democracy in the true sense of the term. This is possible by electing politicians who are ready to dedicate themselves to the cause of people's welfare through holding a free and fair election for which the CTG has made a solemn commitment to the nation.

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