

Taking the NRBs onboard

Let's do it wholeheartedly

THE phrase associating non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) with national development process has been an archetype of a failed agenda. Thanks to home remittances coming anyway from Bangladeshi workers abroad we lost sight of the reservoir of knowledge, expertise, experience and money lying untapped with the wider Bangladeshi diaspora. This tremendous possibility came into focus in the just-concluded three-day NRB conference. It saw 18 seminars held on different issues confronting the expatriate community in terms of their investment in the national development process. We appreciate the initiative of the organisers in arranging such bridge building between the expatriate community and Bangladesh government. Although many expatriate groups couldn't participate and Bangladesh private sector could have played a hands-on role, the fact remains that the venture was a success. However flawed the meet goes down as a flagship marking a good start of the collaboration process. Such conference should not be one-off, instead it ought to be held biennially, if not more frequently, of course with wider representation from four corners of the world.

Of the plethora of suggestions emanating from the conference we have singled out four specific ones to endorse for immediate implementation. The need for coordinating agency in Bangladesh to promote and process investment proposals from expatriate individuals and groups can hardly be over-emphasised. Obviously, it has to be more dynamic than the expatriate welfare ministry which has worked too loosely between workers' welfare and expatriate investment. The administrative and regulatory constraints will have to be overcome by the agency.

Secondly, the proposal for financing demand-based vocational training institutes is an idea that we wholeheartedly support for their potential to meet the changing requirements of international labour market. Thirdly, Innovation in Bangladesh Project by Anwarul Quadir Foundation which gave scholarship worth US dollar 25,000 every year to the best idea deserves to be replicated by others with possibly raising the monetary figure and increasing the number of recipients.

Finally, we are all for our expatriates to invest in bonds which can speed up their association with our development process. India has made a success of it.

Question paper leakage

What's happening in DU Political Science Department?

ONCE again, another scam of despicable nature at the Political Science Department of Dhaka University has come to light. This time it is the allegation of leakage of question papers of the MSc examination 2005, which found their way to the students who were getting ready to take the exam. What is most shameful is that the leaked questions were seen to be up for sale at various student halls on the campus. The VC of the university has reportedly verified the incident, and as usual, has ordered for the formation of an investigation committee to find out how the questions were leaked and who are responsible for it. We find the incident condemnable.

What is going on at the Political Science Department of Dhaka University? We have actually asked this question a number of times in last one year since the most incredible news of over fifty students getting first class in the honours examination hit the headlines. It was an unprecedented feat, which renowned academics of the country had found difficult to comprehend. Immediately with the publication of the results, allegations of favouring some students including political party cadres began to surface in the media. But, despite public furore over the issue for some months, no plausible answer emerged from the administration to satisfy curious minds. The department came under the limelight once again when news of students admitted with fake documents began to be flashed in large fonts across dailies and weeklies. Following investigation, a number of students have been identified who allegedly in cahoots with a section of faculties and administrative staff managed to get admission in the said department. And now the latest scandal with regard to leakage of question papers puts the competence, transparency and accountability of the people from top to bottom in the department under question mark. We feel this time it has gone too far to accept.

It is high time the DU authorities took people's reaction into consideration and launched a thorough investigation into the alleged malpractices going on in the Political Science Department. We believe the public has the right to know who are operating from behind to malign the good name of Dhaka University.

SUZANNE GOLDENBERG

THE first time Benazir Bhutto was thrown out of power, she told her daughter Bakhtawar: "If anybody teases you at school, just tell them, 'But your mother was never prime minister of Pakistan.' " Or so the story goes.

In Pakistan, where the lives of the Bhutto family have been so closely entwined with the history of the country, it does seem like a credible anecdote. Bhutto's assassination begins a possibly even more bitter and bloodstained chapter of her family saga.

Her death leaves no obvious heir for now. Her three children, son Bilawal, and daughters Bakhtawar and Aseefa are all still in their teens. Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, is a discredited and reviled figure in Pakistan, where he is associated with the corruption charges that sank both her governments.

The next in the line of succession would face rivals, and typically for large and landed Pakistani families, some of the most determined of these are also blood relatives -- the would-be heirs of Bhutto's brother, Murtaza.

After his death, his widow, Ghinwa, whom he met during exile

Benazir Bhutto, 54, lived in eye of Pakistan storm

But her record in power left ample room for scepticism. During her two stints in that job -- first from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996 -- she developed a reputation for acting imperiously and impulsively. She faced deep questions about her personal probity in office, which led to corruption cases against her in Switzerland, Spain and Britain, as well as in Pakistan.

JANE PERLEZ and VICTORIA BURNETT

CHARISMATIC, striking and a canny political operator, Benazir Bhutto, 54, was reared amid the privileges of Pakistan's aristocracy and the ordeals of its turbulent politics. Smart, ambitious and resilient, she endured her father's execution and her own imprisonment at the hands of a military dictator to become the country's -- and the Muslim world's -- first female leader.

Deeply polarising figure, Ms. Bhutto, the "daughter of Pakistan," was twice elected prime minister and twice expelled from office in a swirl of corruption charges that propelled her into self-imposed exile in London for much of the past decade. She returned home this fall, billing herself as a bulwark against Islamic extremism and a tribune of democracy.

She was killed on Thursday in a combined shooting and bombing attack at a rally in Rawalpindi, one of a series of open events she attended in spite of a failed assassination attempt against her the day she returned to Pakistan in

October.

A woman of grand aspirations with a taste for complex political manoeuvring, Ms. Bhutto was first elected prime minister in 1988 at the age of 35. The daughter of one of Pakistan's most charismatic and democratically inclined prime ministers, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she inherited the mantle of the populist Peoples Party that he founded, and which she came to personify.

Despite numerous accusations of corruption and an evident predilection for luxury, Ms. Bhutto, the pale-skinned scion of a wealthy landowning family, successfully cast herself as a savior of Pakistan's millions of poor and disenfranchised.

She inspired devotion among her followers, even in exile, and the image of her floating through a frenzied crowd in her gauzy white headscarf became iconic.

In October, she staged a high-profile return to her home city of Karachi, drawing hundreds of thousands of supporters to an 11-hour rally and leading a series of political demonstrations in opposition to the country's military leader, President Pervez Musharraf.

But in a foreshadowing of the attack that killed her, the triumphal return parade was bombed, killing at least 134 of her supporters and wounding more than 400. Ms. Bhutto herself narrowly escaped harm and shouted at later rallies, "Bhutto is alive!"

Despite her courageous, or rash, defiance of danger, her political plans were sidetracked from the moment she set foot in Pakistan: She had been negotiating for months with Mr. Musharraf over a power-sharing arrangement, only to see the general declare emergency rule instead.

The political dance she has deftly performed since her return -- one moment standing up to President Musharraf, the next seeming to accommodate him -- stirred hope and distrust among Pakistanis.

A graduate of Harvard and Oxford, she brought the backing of the governments in Washington and London, where she impressed with her political lineage and considerable charm and was viewed as a palatable alternative to the increasingly unpopular Mr. Musharraf.

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ample room for scepticism. During her two stints in that job -- first from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996 -- she developed a reputation for acting imperiously and impulsively. She faced deep questions about her personal probity in office, which led to corruption cases against her in Switzerland, Spain and Britain, as well as in Pakistan.

Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, was jailed for eight years in Pakistan on corruption charges before his release on bail in 2004.

During her years in office, as during those of her rival, the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan ran up enormous and unserviceable foreign debts and billions of dollars in foreign aid went unaccounted for. Ms. Bhutto, though progressive in her approach to Islam, was not above bending to the will of religious conservatives for when politically expedient.

Ms. Bhutto grew up in the most rarefied atmosphere the poor, turbulent country had to offer. One long-time friend and adviser, Peter W. Galbraith, a former American ambassador to Croatia, recalled meeting Ms. Bhutto 1962 when they were children: he the son of John Kenneth Galbraith, the economist and American ambassador to India; she the daughter of the future Pakistani prime minister. Mr. Galbraith's father was accompanying Jacqueline Kennedy to a horse show in

Lahore.

The two met again at Harvard, where Mr. Galbraith remembered Ms. Bhutto arriving as a prim, cake-baking 16-year-old fresh from a Karachi convent.

Ms. Bhutto often spoke of how her father encouraged her to study the lives of legendary female leaders, including Indira Gandhi and Joan of Arc, and as a young woman, she observed his political manoeuvring up close.

After her father's death -- another general who seized power, Zia ul-Haq, hanged him -- Ms. Bhutto stepped into the spotlight as his successor. She called herself chairperson for life of the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party, a seemingly odd title in an organisation based on democratic ideals and one she has acknowledged quarrelling over with her mother, Nusrat Bhutto, in the early 1990s.

Until her death, Ms. Bhutto ruled the party with an iron hand, jealously guarding her position, even while leading the party in absentia for nearly a decade.

Members of her party saluted her return to Pakistan, saying she was the best choice against President Musharraf. Chief among her attributes, they said, was her sheer determination.

But her egotism and her proclivity for back-room deals provoked distrust among detractors and some supporters.

"She believes she is the chosen one, that she is the daughter of

Bhutto and everything else is secondary," said Feisal Naqvi, a corporate lawyer in Lahore who knew Ms. Bhutto.

Ms. Bhutto's marriage to Mr. Zardari was arranged by her mother, a fact that Ms. Bhutto has often said was easily explained, even for a modern, highly educated Pakistani woman.

To be acceptable to the Pakistani public as a politician she could not be a single woman, and what was the difference, she would ask, between such a marriage and computer dating?

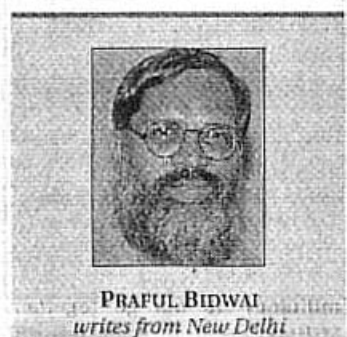
Mr. Zardari, 51, is known for his love of polo and other perquisites of the good life like fine clothes, expensive restaurants, homes in Dubai and London, and an apartment in New York. He was minister of investment in Ms. Bhutto's second government. And it was from that perch that he made many of the deals that haunted Ms. Bhutto, and him, in the courts.

There were accusations that the couple had illegally taken \$1.5 billion from the state. It is a figure Ms. Bhutto vigorously contested.

Indeed, one of Ms. Bhutto's main objectives in seeking to return to power was to restore the reputation of her husband, especially after his prison term, said Abdullah Riar, a former senator in the Pakistani Parliament and a former colleague of Ms. Bhutto's.

Courtesy: © The New York Times.

Democracy's dark side



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

MR. Narendra Modi has surpassed even optimistic forecasts made for the Bharatiya Janata Party's performance to win 117 of the Gujarat Assembly's 182 seats. Although the tally is 10 seats lower than it was in 2002, the BJP's vote is estimated to have marginally increased.

It swept three of Gujarat's four regions. It's only in central Gujarat, which saw the worst violence during 2002 -- and where the BJP had won 38 of 43 seats -- that it suffered big losses.

The BJP's victory defies "normal" electoral arithmetic, based on caste, class, ethnicity and region. It's also unusual because the RSS and VHP didn't campaign for the party.

The BJP's return to power under Mr. Modi is a triumph of intolerance, communalism, hyper-nationalism, and ruthless social regimentation based upon hatred of the underprivileged. It

Gujarat is one state where the upper-caste elite has successfully -- and violently -- suppressed any Dalit or OBC self-assertion since the 1980s. Mr. Modi will now seek a larger, national-level role for himself. The Sangh Parivar will find it hard to contain him. That task has fallen to all those who believe in secularism, freedom and inclusive growth.

represents a setback for democracy, public decency and constitutional values. But it cannot invest the BJP with legitimacy.

Mr. Modi has proved a diabolically successful demagogue, who can descend to any level to win votes. He set the ideological and political agenda, and ran a warlike hate-filled campaign, eclipsing other BJP leaders, including LK Advani.

The extensive use of the Modi mask by his followers only visually underscored the election's nature as a referendum on him. He won it unambiguously.

A great myth is that the election was fought over "development". In fact, Mr. Modi played the communal card from the beginning through the Ram Setu issue and "terrorism" -- shorthand for Muslims.

The communal tone became shriller when he shamelessly justified the cold-blooded killing of Sohrabuddin Shaikh. But Hindutva shadowed the campaign all the way. Mr. Modi's very persona exudes communalism.

The Congress didn't mount a halfway credible challenge to Mr.

Modi. It completely ducked issues concerning the 2002 violence, whose victims continue to be excluded and brutalised. It carefully avoided any reference to the pogrom, and to the state's culpability.

Since it came to power nationally, the Congress has done very little for the victims. In Gujarat, it adopted a "soft Hindutva" posture, and competed with Mr. Modi on his own terrain. Each time he cited Godhra, the Congress would invoke Akshardham.

Even worse, the Congress recruited anti-Modi BJP rebels, many of them deeply implicated in the 2002 carnage, such as former junior Home Minister Goverdhan Zardaphia. It gave tickets to many, thus damaging its own secular credentials.

It's only in the very last leg of the campaign that the Congress took a spirited anti-communal stand, with Ms. Sonia Gandhi deploring the "merchants of death." But this came late and was unrelated to the party's basic strategy and most of its campaign.

There's speculation on whether Ms. Gandhi's remark

cost the Congress loss of support. The loss was at best marginal. In any case, the remark was apt.

But Mr. Modi mounted a disgracefully dishonest defence of his violation of the electoral code of conduct and didn't tone down his murderous rhetoric even after the Election Commission mildly reprimanded him -- and in an unconvincing show of evenhandedness, also snubbed Ms. Gandhi.

The Congress also failed to take on Mr. Modi on human development, poverty, income and regional disparities, and livelihood questions. Gujarat's high GDP growth hasn't helped abolish mass deprivation. As many as 74 per cent of its women, and 46 per cent of its children are anaemic.

Gujarat's society remains hideously iniquitous. Agriculture is thriving, but child labour is rampant in the fields. Hazardous industries flourish as nowhere else. Coercion drives growth through crony-capitalist Special Economic Zones and private ports, which involve forced land acquisition.

The Congress had no alterna-

tive to offer to such maldevelopment or to Mr. Modi's celebration of elitism. It failed to build on the gains it made in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, when it won a majority of Assembly segments.

The only silver lining for the Congress is that it recovered its traditional base amongst the Adivasis. It did better where it distanced itself from BJP rebels, as in central Gujarat.

Its too-clever-by-half strategy of trying to win Leuva Patel support through the pro-Keshubhai rebels came a cropper in Saurashtra-Kutch, where the BJP improved its tally from 39 to 43 seats (of 58). Only one of the "rebels" won. So did only one of the 10 Lok Sabha seats.

Ultimately, Mr. Modi won because of his demagogic appeal based on militant Hindutva, Gujarati hubris, and a despotic personality that respects no democratic values, but is admired for its decisiveness.

Mr. Modi "gets things done" by any means. If Bt-cotton is to be promoted to please agribusiness, it'll be rammed down the throats of peasants -- no matter that 500 farmers have committed suicide. If fertile land is to be procured for a toxic chemicals plant, it will be forcibly acquired. If labour unions demand the minimum wage, they must be smashed.

The admiration this ruthless

decisiveness evokes among the middle classes is similar to the spell that Hitler and Mussolini cast because of their "efficiency": the "trains run on time."

This speaks to a cult of personality, and of a quasi-fascist personality at that. Why else would thousands upon thousands of Modi supporters choose to suppress their own identities, by wearing masks moulded after his face?

The bulk of the Hindu middle class doesn't feel even an iota of remorse for what happened in 2002. This speaks of a deep social pathology. Gujarat has clearly graduated from a Hindutva laboratory into a large-scale Hindutva factory under the longest spell of BJP rule anywhere.

Communalism serves many functions in Gujarat: disenfranchising Muslims, consolidating upper-caste domination, and enforcing oppressive social regimentation against the labouring poor.

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Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

'She has not laid on her children the expectations laid on her'

"In politics she carried her father's legacy, but in her personal life she was her own self. I don't think that she was thinking [that] her son or daughter ought to pick up the banner of the PPP," said Peter Galbraith, a former US diplomat who befriended Bhutto during their second year at Harvard. "I don't think she has laid on her children the same expectations that were laid on her, or that she created for herself."

In Syria, took up the leadership of his breakaway faction of the PPP. Murtaza's daughter by his first wife, Fatima Bhutto, has also emerged as a harsh critic of her estranged aunt.

Bhutto's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was hanged in 1979 by the dictator of the day in Pakistan, General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq. His death plunged Bhutto, then a cosseted daughter who had spent her youth at Harvard and Oxford, into the tumult of Pakistani politics.

In 1987, at an advanced age in Pakistan for a bride, she consented to an arranged marriage with the son of a Karachi cinema hall owner, Asif Ali Zardari. The match between the intelligent, worldly Bhutto and the son of a traditional feudal family mystified her western friends. But within a year, she became prime minister, wrote a book, and had her first child.

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up the banner of the PPP," said Peter Galbraith, a former US diplomat who befriended Bhutto during their second year at Harvard. "I don't think she has laid on her children the same expectations that were laid on her, or that she created for herself."

Bhutto was the mainstay of her children's life in recent years as her husband served several years in prison in Pakistan on suspicion of murder and corruption and sought medical treatment for a heart condition in the US. She and her children lived in Dubai.

Galbraith said Bhutto delayed her return from self-exile precisely because she was worried about the toll on her family. Months before her departure she was engaged in deciding which university her eldest would attend, Harvard or Oxford.

"This weighed heavily on her," he said. "There are some politicians who are just one dimension - that is all they care about and think about - but that wasn't true for her."

Courtesy, The Guardian, UK

Duty, destiny and death: the final preoccupations

Bhutto felt the threats to her life had escalated during Musharraf's tenure. "I do face certain danger but it is my duty to return to Pakistan to rescue a society wracked by violence and being pushed into extremism by its unelected government," she said.

CATHY SCOTT-CLARK and ADRIAN LEVY

DUTY, destiny and most of all death were on Benazir Bhutto's mind when the Guardian spent time with her shortly before she left for Pakistan in October.

"I'm quite fatalistic," she said. "I think that the time of life is written and the time of death is written and nobody can die before their time is up. I don't dwell on what could happen."

For someone who had survived a plethora of assassination attempts, she had a lofty disregard for her own safety. Among those who had already tried and failed was the "nasty, little tin-

pot dictator" General Zia ul-Haq, who sent a doctor to kill her in her jail cell in 1982.

Osama bin Laden had put up \$10m to fund a Pakistan military plot against her in 1989. World Trade Centre bomber Ramzi Yousef and 9/11 planner Khalid Sheikh Mohammed had both made attempts in 1993.

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Describing a suicide bombing in Karachi last May, in which

dozens of People's party supporters were killed during a political rally, an atrocity that Bhutto blamed on the Pakistan army, she conjured an image that uncannily resembled her own demise, seven months later: "You are standing there seeing people all around you fall down bleeding and taking their last breaths before you. In that situation you feel terrorised and many people will get coopted to the militants only to survive."

She claimed Musharraf had embraced the fundamentalists and "thrown Pakistanis to the wolves". She said: "One has to protect ordinary people from the terror of the extremist forces who are trying to turn peaceful Muslim societies into killing fields, killing innocent people on tubes and trains and in towers."

Death had always pursued the Bhutto family. After her father was hanged in 1979, her two brothers were killed. Shah Nawaz Bhutto, the younger, was

poisoned in the South of France in 1984, a day after she had flown into Nice to visit him. "I can still see him at the airport, dressed in white, suntanned and so happy," she said.

By the time Murtaza, her second brother, was killed in a police shootout in Karachi in 1996, her own children were fearful. "All a mother wants is for her children to be safe and to support them through life," she said. "But my son and daughters became scared I wouldn't return even though I told them no matter what, I would always be back. I am Pakistan's last hope," she declared, with her trademark immodesty, as she swept out of the room with a whirl of her white dupatta.

"I'm going, in any event I'll be there in time for New Year's Eve." In the end she left on October 18 and lasted just over two months.

Courtesy, The Guardian, UK