

PM at Senakunja and the Parliament

Open-minded approach is welcome but not caustic comments for the opposition

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina made two very important statements the day before yesterday, one at the Senakunja and the other in the Jatiya Sangsad when talking on the obituary reference on the dastardly killings of BDR officers.

We would like to commend her for talking to the army officers of Dhaka garrison. This was an appropriate and timely step on her part. As expected, the nearly three hours that she spent with the officers was taken up with the matters relating to the BDR mutiny, and as expected there were emotional exchanges too.

Be that as it may, it was, one is given to understand, also an occasion for a free and open discussion that allowed for the clearing up of misgivings in any quarter related to actions taken by the government following the mutiny, and the rationale and compulsions, as well as the constraints of the government, for certain actions or 'inaction'. That, some among the officers took this occasion to let off their emotions is neither unexpected nor unnatural. This, we hope, has assuaged the feelings of some officers as well as helped establish equanimity among all concerned.

The speech of the prime minister during the discussion in the Jatiya Sangsad on the obituary motion in respect of the officers killed in the mutiny, has served a good purpose of informing the nation about the revolt and the various actions taken to quell the rebellion and all that have followed since.

However, we have been somewhat disappointed by the tone of the PM's speech in the Parliament which, we feel, could have been less caustic and cynical towards the leader of the opposition. While a touch of sarcasm may liven up a parliamentary speech, that was neither the time nor the place to offer riposte to all the opposition points. In that solemn and sombre occasion what we wanted to see was moderation in the department of the leader of the House. The opposition could also have shown greater maturity.

We were quite frankly dismayed to notice the rather rancorous tone in the speech of the members from both sides of the aisle. That was not in keeping with the solemnity of the subject under discussion. It was sad to see the members delving into the past unnecessarily and missed no opportunity in having a dig at each other. Can no occasion pass off without exchange of diatribes, even an occasion as sombre as obituary reference?

To unite the nation it is for the PM to take the lead in encouraging the opposition to participate in floor discussions openly, and not to be inhibited by the type of comments we heard being made by the treasury bench.

Rescued job seekers

Bring the swindlers to justice

THE 49 Bangladeshis rescued by the Indian Coast Guard and then handed over to Bangladesh authorities by the BSF personnel are the latest victims of a massive swindle by fake recruiting agents thriving on the gullibility and desperation of people seeking jobs abroad. It's another tragic tale of unemployed young men taking the plunge into certainty, and ending up in the deep sea.

The saddest part of the story is that nearly 300 of them drowned in the sea as they were intercepted by the Thai police who seized their trawlers, took the engines off, and let the vessels carrying them drift into the deep sea. The Thai police authorities of course failed to show the slightest concern for the lives of Bangladeshi job seekers who had unfortunately ended up on the Thai coast. So, 300 lives have been lost because the desperate job seekers did not suspect any foul play when their alleged recruiters had promised to take them to Malaysia.

Now, this not the first time that job seekers died in such unfortunate circumstances. Quite a few incidents took place in the past, which prove that a section of highly unscrupulous people, masquerading as recruiting agents, are taking advantage of the vulnerability and desperation of Bangladeshi job seekers. While these young men usually are treated very harshly when they are identified by foreign authorities as illegal immigrants or intruders, their recruiters never come to their rescue. They either die or, if they are lucky enough, return home empty handed.

The question is, how long will this continue? How long will the job seekers fall prey to swindlers? On this particular occasion, 49 of them were lucky enough to be rescued by the Indian Coast Guard, but 300 others perished. And it seems nobody is responsible for what is going on in the name of providing jobs abroad.

True, the job seekers are often gullible enough to fall into the recruiters' trap. But that alone cannot alter the truth that little is being done to bring the fake recruiters to justice. Obviously, with serious effort it should not be difficult to find out the fake recruiters. On the preventive side, the campaign for alerting the potential job seekers against the cheats has to be intensified at the local community levels. Social groups and NGOs can come forward to help the victims get legal assistance. Finally, as we have said several times in the past, the whole business of recruitment abroad has to be made transparent within a legal framework. All sorts of illegal, underhand dealing in this area will have to be checkmated with an appropriate action programme.

Amnesty was the right step

Some quarters' comment that there could have been an armed approach to the imbroglio is anything but well thought out because it would have caused exchange of fire between the rebels inside and the army battalion outside, resulting in many civilian casualties in surrounding areas.

MD. ALI AKBAR

IT was the prime minister's offer of general amnesty and deadline for the rebels' surrender of arms that ended the horrific 33 hour mutiny. The ruthless killing of scores of army officers and their wives and children by the mutineers speaks of the worst cowardice and a heinous conspiracy.

It could be conspiracy because it is unimaginable that the BDR jawans, who have been traditionally loyal to the command, killed so many of their unarmed commanding officers on the pretext that some demands were not met. It is absurd to even contemplate.

Although initially the mutiny was sought to be passed off as an outburst of pent-up rage from deprivation and maltreatment of jawans at the hands of the army officers in command, the unfolding facts point to a much more troubling plot.

It is not only a debilitating blow to the army as an institution, but also seemingly a conspiracy against the nation itself. Irrespective of party and opinion, we must face up to this challenge unitedly.

In hindsight, it is clear that the mutiny was designed to create a wrong impression about the army. Within hours, the mutineers began to spit venom against the army by giving free-style statements to

the media. They alleged that the army had done wrong during the last two years. That was their justification for the unprecedented brutalities committed.

The slogan "people-BDR brotherhood" raised by a small bunch of people who thronged the BDR gate from nowhere sounded quite ominous in that it amounted to an evil effort at pitting the army against the BDR.

What transpired has led some analysts to suspect that the mutiny was led by some yet unknown elements who sought to break the chain of command in the disciplined force, and thus undermine our national security.

Without knowing the magnitude of the death and destruction wrought by the mutineers, the media, many say, jumped rather too promptly into airing all the uncorroborated stuff gathered one-sidedly from them. Every sinner has his own excuse for the sin perpetrated by him. The free media should have kept that in mind.

If the media had been a little more vigilant and circumspect, the unsuspecting public would not have been so misinformed as to form an unwholesome impression of the army.

Now the onus lies on the media to help repair the damage and present a two-sided picture.



Bloodshed had to be stopped.

The prime minister's patient and sagacious dealing with the rebelling elements by offering general amnesty for handing over weapons seemed to be the right step under the circumstances.

Her statesmanship spared the nation an unimaginable bloodbath, because an unknown number of civil and military hostages, including women and children, were still under rebel custody inside the BDR compound. Amnesty was the right step to resolve the mutiny without firing a single shot, and to prevent a bigger mayhem.

Some quarters' comment that there could have been an armed approach to the imbroglio is anything but well thought out because it would have caused exchange of fire between the rebels inside and the army battalion outside, resulting in many civilian casualties in surrounding

areas. That could have also created an opportunity for the rebels and their backers to fan and foment further violence. Those who are now criticising the general amnesty to rebels might have been critical themselves had things gone wrong.

The amnesty will not cover crimes killing, looting, arson, etc. The prime minister herself has made it clear, and added that the trial of the crimes would be held as per the code of the respective forces.

There should be no politicking over the granting of general amnesty. All quarters should rally round the national security interest concern, and join hands. Unity will embolden us, as it did in the past, to translate the tragedy into strength.

Md. Ali Akbar is a Deputy Secretary to the Government.

What Hillary didn't do in Asia

China relies on America as a market for its manufactured products. And China has encouraged US to rely on it to fund its budget deficits. When Clinton said: "I appreciate greatly the Chinese government's continuing confidence in US Treasuries," she validated China's strategy of buying US debt as a way to restrain America's freedom of movement.

KISHORE MAHBUBANI

WHY did Hillary Clinton lose the race for the democratic presidential nomination? Simple. She had a plan A: to romp through initial primaries, and squash her opponents. But when plan A failed, she found she had no backup. Clinton failed to engage in strategic thinking in the biggest competition of her life, and it cost her.

All this made her a curious choice to become secretary of state.

The key to doing her new job well is to engage in long-term strategic thinking on major geopolitical challenges -- such as the US role in managing the rise of Asia.

Her recent trip there provides clues on how she'll manage this task. There's no doubt she did a competent job. Clinton followed the advice of her briefing books,

making Japan her first stop to reassure this insecure ally.

Then she went to Indonesia to rebuild America's image in the world's most populous Islamic country. South Korea was an essential stop to send the usual tough signals to North Korea. And then came China, her most important destination.

All throughout she made no mistakes. She said and did the right things. In China she said, "We have to look inward for solutions, but we must also look to each other to take a leadership role to stabilise the world's economy and begin recovery." This must have pleased her hosts.

Yet there's little evidence Clinton has engaged in any serious strategic thinking about US-China relations. If she had, she would have asked some big questions. Traditionally, relations between dominant and emerging powers have been tense.

This should have been the norm here too.

Yet China has emerged without alarming Americans. That's close to a geopolitical miracle.

Beijing's strategy toward US is complex. Chinese leaders have consistently followed the advice to keep a low profile. Yet they have also created a balanced interdependence with US, reducing Washington's ability to pressure them.

China relies on America as a market for its manufactured products. And China has encouraged US to rely on it to fund its budget deficits. When Clinton said: "I appreciate greatly the Chinese government's continuing confidence in US Treasuries," she validated China's strategy of buying US debt as a way to restrain America's freedom of movement.

It's hard to tell if US is pursuing a similarly coherent strategy toward China; instead there is a hodgepodge of policies. Wisely, the US has decided to help integrate China into the world economy. This policy has worked, leading Chinese society to open up considerably as a result.

The thousands of Chinese students in US universities have become major agents of change at home.

Yet Washington has demonstrated far less strategic thinking on a range of other issues, such as Iran, North Korea, Iraq and Sudan. The Chinese view such issues as parts of a whole, and constantly look

for trade-offs.

Hence they were happy to cooperate on North Korea and Iraq, for which they were rewarded when President Bush put significant pressure on Taiwan not to push for independence.

This was a major victory for China. Any objective balance sheet would show more gains for China than the US. By cooperating selectively, China has thwarted the emergence of any US strategy to contain or prevent its rise.

So what should America's long-term strategy towards China look like? To start, Washington should revisit its assumptions. The Chinese Communist Party is not going to disappear like the Soviet Union, as many US policymakers privately hope.

Thus, Washington should focus on integrating China even more into the international system and abandon policies China perceives as destabilising, like support for the Dalai Lama or criticism of China's human-rights violations.

Thus, Clinton still needs a big-picture view of the world's largest nation. If she fails to think strategically, the result will be an even stronger China. If she succeeds, China may turn out just as strong -- but become a much more cooperative and restrained partner.

Mahbubani is Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

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Nurturing indigenous knowledge

Localisation of knowledge and nurturing of indigenous knowledge are only possible if these concepts are reflected in our education policy. Unfortunately, our education policy is still following the British colonial legacy. The underlying philosophy of the colonial education policy was not to uphold the economic or cultural aspects of society.

MD. ANWARUL KABIR

KNOWLEDGE-based society has become a buzzword these days, although people in developed countries started their journey towards such a society at the beginning of the last century. Globalisation has paved the way for the realisation of the much-talked-about knowledge-based societies in the true sense. The compression of time and distance due to the ICT revolution has played a pivotal role in this context since the closing decade of the last century.

To achieve real development, Bangladesh must create a knowledge-based society. As exchange of knowledge among nations is not difficult now, knowledge has become global property to some extent. To take advantage of this, we need to formulate strategies considering our socio-economic needs and cultural aspects.

Every bit of knowledge has two aspects, namely theoretical and empirical. For the overall development of a society, applied or empirical knowledge is very crucial. For instance, theoretically, we may know different strategies of marketing but, unless we

use them in our marketing efforts, they cannot make any contribution to our business growth. No doubt, the basis of development of applied knowledge lies in the theoretical knowledge.

Theoretical knowledge of natural science has direct correlation with the present technological advancement. But the advancement of natural science, in fact, has become possible due to the growing demand of the technological fronts. In essence, it can be ascertained that if we want civilisation to keep its pace, applied or empirical knowledge should be considered first.

However, to make Bangladesh knowledge-based, we must consider both theoretical and empirical knowledge. Theoretical knowledge, like Newton's laws of motion or Einstein's theory of relativity, is universal. But applied knowledge in many cases is context dependent and has both time and cultural dimensions. Since the industrial revolution in the 19th century, the western world -- the United States in particular -- has been leading in the domains of both theoretical and scientific knowledge. So, a less advanced country like ours must receive knowledge from the developed world for the

overall advancement of society.

When we think about technology transfer we should not consider it straightforward without assessing its feasibility and effectiveness in the receiving countries. For example, transfer of power-plant technology of the US or of any European country will not be beneficial to our country because we must rely either on foreign aid or on foreign investors for the installation of such huge plants. But both foreign aid and foreign investors are considered to be detrimental in the long run.

So, we should focus on smaller, localised power plants, which can be installed by local entrepreneurs. Moreover, use of solar energy and biogas may be considered for economic viability. This sort of transfer of knowledge, according to our socio-economic needs, may be termed as localisation of knowledge.

Another example of localisation of knowledge may be of ICT. While developing software systems, designing of the user interface in Bangla should be considered because only a tiny fraction of the people know English. Besides, for economic reasons, we should prefer open-source software to proprietary software. So, in essence, any applied knowledge that we receive from another country must be assimilated and adapted in our own context.

Beside localisation of knowledge, we must emphasise promotion of our own knowledge or technology. Ironically, indigenous knowledge, skills and technology are neglected in our education system. For example, in the business study course at the tertiary level, we teach different aspects of business taking foreign business concerns like Ford, Motorola, etc. as test cases. But we hardly take

any initiative to explore the business strategies of the traders of Old Dhaka or the *sawdagars* of Chittagong who traditionally have proved themselves as successful business communities in Bangladesh.

Rather than teaching about foreign corporate houses, studying these local business strategies and ethics will be more relevant. Moreover, by theorising these indigenous business skills, the country may be benefited much on the economic front.

Indigenous knowledge may also be found in many other areas. On the textile front, our traditional weaving industry may be one classic example. Incorporating state-of-the-art technology, it will be possible to enhance the productivity of our weaving industry. However, for nurturing indigenous skills and technologies we must be innovative, so that we can blend these with the advanced technological knowledge of the present era.

Localisation of knowledge and nurturing of indigenous knowledge are only possible if these concepts are reflected in our education policy. Unfortunately, our education policy is still following the British colonial legacy. The underlying philosophy of the colonial education policy was not to uphold the economic or cultural aspects of society.

So, for overall development, we must formulate our own education policy after evaluating the socio-economic and cultural scenarios. Just mimicking the curriculum and education system of developed countries without considering our own context will certainly jeopardise our venture towards a knowledge-based society.

Md. Anwarul Kabir is an educationalist working at AIUB and a freelance writer. Email: kabir@aiub.edu