

# Time for a truce

To regain and portray any semblance of respect and dignity of our nation, it is high time for a truce between the two political camps to formulate an agreed-upon policy in naming, retaining and renaming the institutions.

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

**N**AMING of institutions to commemorate persons for their contribution to society is a well-accepted practice. In every society, a few norms are practiced in naming institutions of national importance, especially when dealing with politicians who are still at the helm.

In Western democracies, no institution ever carries the name of a sitting president or prime minister. It is rare even to honour a living former president or PM by affixing their names to any institution, no matter how much their efforts were effective in the flourishing of the body in question.

A rare exception is only exhibited in the United States where, as a traditional practice, a library is set up in the ex-president's home town, mostly with private donations, bearing the name of the outgoing chief executive.

Bangladesh is probably the only country among the Westminster democracies where it is mandatory for the government offices to hang the portrait of the PM. Incidentally, in her first term, Sheikh Hasina is the only among our PMs and presidents whose portrait did not dangle on the walls of office buildings, nor did any institution bear her name, during her last tenure as the PM.

In fact, her government's decision

to hang only the portrait of Bangabandhu, the father of the nation, was a very prudent one to bestow the long-deserved honour to the greatest national hero of the land. Unfortunately, she was not able to maintain the same in her current tenure.

During the presidency of the late Ziaur Rahman, he strictly maintained the policy of not allowing anyone to honour him by naming any institution after him. Not long after his tragic death, the government of the day went on a naming spree and, by early 1996, just before the fall of the BNP government, there were around 500 institutions that carried Ziaur Rahman's name.

Begum Zia, as the PM, apparently did not spare any opportunity to inaugurate institutions exhibiting her name. Most universities, including Rajshahi University and Islamic University, which had a female dormitory constructed during her tenure, gave such dorms her name. Even the medical college attached to Shurawardy Hospital was named after her.

There was a proposal to name a female dormitory of Dhaka University after her, defying the long and highly acclaimed tradition of not naming any element of this great university after any living human being. The said



There has been too much renaming.

dormitory was proposed to be named after the late Begum Sufia Kamal, an eminent female icon of our nation, during the tenure of the erstwhile AL government.

During the tenure of the last AL government, seldom were the names given by the preceding BNP government changed. However, the last alliance government did not reciprocate that gesture. According to a report the names of more than 150 institutions, including all the institutions that carried Bangabandhu's

name, were given new names. Even the M.A. Hannan airport of Chittagong and the Syed Nazrul Islam bridge were renamed.

At that time, in a piece in DS (July 18, 2005), I wrote: "If the BNP ever has to evacuate the helm of authority and if a non-BNP government pays them back in the same coin, what would be BNP's option to counter that tit for tat move? It might call hartal, as it did when a pontoon bridge linking Ziaur Rahman's mausoleum was removed from the lake, or resort to a few street

demonstrations. However, would it help it to regain the lost moral ground?"

That time has come, and the current government has decided to go back to the originally given names. The BNP and its loyal allies never uttered a single word of criticism when the BNP-Jamaat government renamed those institutions. By doing so, they lost all their moral authority to protest the current government move.

However, there are many in our

society who possesses the high moral ground to criticise a major move of the government, which is renaming the Zia International Airport. Albeit I do not find anything wrong in the removal the murals of Ziaur Rahman from Bangabandhu stadium and Mujibnager mausoleum, since there is no reason why they should be there in the first place.

The AL leadership has to understand that the people expect a much higher standard of governance from the party which led the country to freedom. BNP is no AL. A tit for tat action will only place them on the same berth with BNP.

To regain and portray any semblance of respect and dignity of our nation, it is high time for a truce between the two political camps to formulate an agreed-upon policy in naming, retaining and renaming the institutions. It is the BNP that has to offer this olive branch since they are the ones who did not reciprocate the tolerance shown by the previous AL government.

The parliament would be the best venue for formulating such a truce, and it could be initiated by the defacto deputy leader of the opposition. He holds this unique position since his multiple changing of political camps was never guided by any ideological affinity or antipathy, which naturally led people to assume his lack of animosity against any political camps or parties whatsoever.

Dr. Mozammel H. Khan is the Convenor of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

# Return of sanity in student politics

Student politics is considered a necessity because it works as a deterrent against exploitation and dictatorship. Unfortunately, Bangladesh student politics is now a miserable victim of unholy politics.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

**W**ITH so many lives lost in the struggle for independence, with so many students and political activists incarcerated and tortured in jails for attaining our rights, we naturally expected a better political atmosphere from 2009. Unfortunately students' restlessness belied our expectation.

The present government, though a democratically elected one, is rather hesitant to control student restlessness harshly. With the deteriorating situation in different campuses it appears that it would be proper for the government to start thinking hard about bringing sanity in student politics. Unnecessary delay in taking a decision may create a traumatic situation leading to failure of administration.

We fully appreciate the glorious contribution of our student community in the language movement (1952), ousting of Gen. Ayub (1969), independence of Bangladesh (1971) and overthrowing of a military regime (1989). This does not mean that we should ignore their wrongdoings, which are hurting the interest of the people, the development effort of the government and the stability of the society.

Bangladesh universities are no longer temples of learning. They are now prominent centres for politics. Student politics is considered a necessity because it works as a deterrent against exploitation

and dictatorship. Unfortunately, Bangladesh student politics is now a miserable victim of unholy politics.

The main reason for the current student unrest appears to be the show of muscle power by some terrorists in the name of the parties they belong to, and they are usually set free even if picked up by the law enforcing authority. Members of civil society believe that the pattern of leadership of student politics will have to be changed to save the students. The meritorious and the efficient will have to be given proper positions.

The present practice of maintaining basket holders must be discontinued. The godfathers of student politics must be identified, irrespective of party affiliations. Suppliers of arms to universities, and establishing of arms supply centres near universities must be wiped out. The residential halls of students must be searched regularly and thoroughly.

Both BNP and AL are involved in politics mainly for acquiring power. The student wings of both the parties are interested in expanding power bases. Crimes like extortions and tender-hunting are committed for their own interest, and they do not have any ideology. In the past, the leftist students' organisations had the reputation of being peaceful. No longer are they so. The militant Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) has become a most atrocious student organisation.

If student organisations operate as per their respective constitutions and

free themselves from political control, only then can they return to the golden days of student politics. Let every student leader be accountable, as in the past when elections were held regularly every year.

Our students have merit but they are not interested in politics. They want to remain as ordinary students. To bring back the talented students to politics, like in the past, some epoch-making direction has to come from national politics. This is possible only through close cooperation and understanding between the top leaders of BNP and AL.

Our politicians are utilising our students for their own benefit and the benefit of their parties. This is resulting in leading some students astray and even untimely death. How cruel and heartless it can be when we understand that the majority of them are sons and daughters of poor parents. Furthermore, restive campuses are causing session jams, failure in completion of the syllabi and compelling the students to adopt unfair means in exams.

Truly speaking, Bangladesh never had student politics. Representational activity of students, as is seen in Oxford and Cambridge, can be practiced in Bangladesh campuses. Cambridge student politics is particularly impressive.

There, the students work together to assert their rights and get their voices heard, and stay aloof from petty party politics.

It would be our appeal to the politicians to create a peaceful atmosphere to enable the students to concentrate on their studies, and to restrain them from pushing the state towards becoming a failed state.

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former Joint Secretary.

# Why India should talk

To assess whether such change is feasible, holding talks with Islamabad is desirable provided it is clearly understood it will be the final attempt. And since it ought to be the final attempt India should bluntly seek an open commitment from Islamabad about the goal that is to be reached.

RAJINDER PURI

**I**NDIA'S BJP party has responded to the Pune bomb blast with the demand that the foreign secretary-level talks with Pakistan scheduled for the 25th of this month be cancelled. This was the logical, reasonable and expected response. But was it the wisest response?

The BJP asked: what has changed for New Delhi to agree to resumption of dialogue while terror continues? Good question. The answer provides the reason why the dialogue should resume, why India should be blunt rather than diplomatic, and why this should be the final call for any settlement.

The bomb blast took place just before the talks were to resume, just after the US launched its current military surge in Afghanistan, and just before US Senator John Kerry was to reach Delhi before going to Islamabad. Pakistani terrorist leaders have openly stated that they opposed the resumption of dialogue between India and Pakistan. That should explain the timing of the bomb blast. It was engineered to scuttle the talks.

But would scuttling of the talks please Pakistan's civilian government which could have drawn political mileage from its constituents through these talks? One doubts that. However it would most certainly please the hardcore pro-jihadi elements enconced in the Pakistan government and army. The following conclusions may be drawn therefore about the current situation in Pakistan from the events as they have unfolded.

First, there are elements in the Pakistani government that are genuinely opposed to terrorism and would like a settlement with India that favours Pakistan. At the same time there are more powerful elements in the Pakistani establishment that are opposed to any peace settlement with India. The Pakistan establishment therefore is a divided house.

Secondly, the elements seeking normalisation with India are incapable of delivering on any promises they might make. It is irrelevant if such failure is perceived to stem from inability or duplicity or a mixture of both. The moot point is that



Solving the problems.

Islamabad as constituted at present cannot deliver.

Thirdly, it cannot escape notice that there is only one global power that has displayed a vested interest in keeping India and Pakistan apart. And whether by design or by default the pro-jihadi fundamentalist elements in Pakistan serve the interests of this power. It is no secret that Pakistan's nuclear and missile strength, which makes its army such a potent force, is derived from China.

China is badly misguided in pursuing its policy of isolating India in South Asia. But it would realise its error only when ground realities are actually changed in the subcontinent. To make such change possible should be India's top priority.

To assess whether such change is feasible, holding talks with Islamabad is desirable provided it is clearly

understood it will be the final attempt. And since it ought to be the final attempt India should bluntly seek an open commitment from Islamabad about the goal that is to be reached. Would Islamabad be willing to commit to an eventual India-Pakistan relationship encompassing joint defence and trade?

Kashmir, water and other conten-

tious issues could be resolved to mutual satisfaction much more easily in the light of such a relationship. Within Pakistan such an announcement would bring polarisation into the open. All those irrevocably open to India would come out of the closet to fight the Pakistan government. That would make things much easier for Islamabad to weed out the rot. If Islamabad is agreeable to an open commitment, then talks may continue.

If Islamabad is unwilling and continues to serve wittingly or unwittingly foreign interests rather than its own, then it is time to bid Pakistan goodbye. There are other options that India can pursue to protect its national interest.



Campuses should be serene places.