



The boys of Chidambaram

Dr Singh's good intentions are not in doubt. But he does tend to get tempted towards by-lanes in his anxiety to reach heaven. Sharm-el-Sheikh was one such foray that helped no one except India-baiters in Islamabad. The "boys of Chidambaram" is another that can help no one except Pakistan-baiters in Delhi.

M.J. AKBAR

THE best way to manage a controversy is to initiate it. Omar Abdullah was not giving voice to some sudden inner revelation when he suggested that the "boys" who had gone across the Line of Control could be welcomed back, surely as part of some ongoing Indo-Pak deal. Ghulam Nabi Azad's riposte stole opposition space, another clever ploy, if it was prearranged. It might not have been. Azad could have been motivated by legitimate concerns. Home Minister Chidambaram's support to Omar Abdullah, however, confirmed that there had been consultations between the two before Omar broached such a slippery subject.

Chidambaram, as we all, know, is a fine lawyer. A lawyer's skill rests on the dictum that facts are malleable, and argument is infallible. This is a heady tribute to human intellect, since it makes the mind a decisive arbiter. Alas, for every forensic ploy there is another waiting on the counter. Chidambaram has introduced the rather disingenuous logic that since these "boys" (can't call them "terrorists" anymore, can we?) merely went across to territory that India still claims as its own, they never left Indian soil. They are only being resettled at another Indian address.

Counsel for opposition could open his arguments with a potent challenge: Why is the home minister so anxious to bring back those who left India to wage war against it, when it has not been able to rehabilitate those, like Kashmiri Pandits, who were driven out by militants? Is the welfare of those who wanted to destroy India more important to Delhi than the welfare of those who wanted to preserve the multi-religious, secular character of Kashmir and India?

Chidambaram's "boys" went to Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir not because they thought they were moving on to another part of Indian soil, but to launch a war through which they would snatch Kashmir from India, and were prepared to offer their lives for such a cause. They dream of either independence or integration into Pakistan. Perhaps our home minister believes that boys will be boys. Or he may have found time to delve into the Bible and ruminate over the parable of the prodigal, which explains the metaphysics of slaying the fatted calf for a prodigal.

The more intriguing question is, why would the prodigal want to come back? Are they ideologically disillusioned and have now become torchbearers of Indian secularism? Or do they want to be reunited with their families, a much more reasonable and realistic aspiration? The one question that cannot be satisfactorily answered, except over time, is this: Have Pakistan-based groups and agencies which still believe in the "Kashmir Jihad" abandoned these "boys" or will there be, among them, some who will resume an insurrection from Indian Kashmir? Is the risk worth taking for India?

Basic question: Who has identified the proposed prodigals as authentic? They did not leave their names and addresses with



Whose line is it anyway?

the Intelligence Bureau in Srinagar when they went off to prepare for their holy war. There are no special genetic traits that differentiate Kashmiris on either side of the LOC. The Pakistan government did not control this lot directly. They were outsourced to outfits like the Jamaat-e-Islami and Lashkar-e-Taiba, so the only people who would know a genuine cross-border warrior from a homegrown one would be Jamaat or LET. Would Delhi honour certificates handed out by LET?

Who -- Delhi or Islamabad -- has placed the return of warriors into the dialogue framework? If it was not on the agenda, or going to be put there, why would Delhi inject the thought into public discourse?

An India-Pakistan dialogue is a tiptoe through minefields at the best of times, so one is curious as to why more mines should be planted on the eve of yet another summit. There is a special excitement about the 2010 talks because they have been rescued from a trough as deep as crater resulting from the December 13 attack on Parliament; and because Dr Manmohan Singh has made it amply clear that peace with Pakistan is the principal objective of his second term. The adage that the road to hell is paved with good intentions has its uses in a debating society; the road to heaven, after all, cannot be paved with bad intentions. Good intentions take you to a crossroads. After that, your destination, heaven or hell, is entirely dependent on your judgment.

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M.J. Akbar is Director of Publications, Covert.

Winter Olympics is not an Olympics

If the white folks want to have fun, and frolic in the snow and on ice, and the world wants to watch it, that is perfectly all right. But please, do not call it an "Olympics" where the whole world is supposed to participate.

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

THE Olympics Movement and the Olympics Games are supposed to embrace the whole world. The so-called "Winter Olympics" does not. Only the cold and rich nations participate in these games. And like the ice and snow on which the games are staged, the participants, too, are predominantly lily-white.

The Usain Bolts of the world do not have a chance in the Winter Games. Where are the African athletes? Where are the Asian (except Japan, South Korea, and China, which are also rich and cold) and South American athletes? Is it their fault that their countries are not cold enough to have snow and ice, nor rich enough to send their athletes to train in Europe?

The Winter Olympics have never been a part of the ancient or the modern Olympics. The first "winter sports" were held in Sweden in 1901 and was appropriately named the "Nordic Games." They were held every two

or four years until 1926.

The organiser of the Nordic Games, General Viktor Gustaf Balck, a member of the International Committee (IOC) and a close friend of the founder of the modern Olympics, Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin, first pushed for the inclusion of skating events in the Summer Olympics, and later for a separate "Winter Olympics."

He was joined in his efforts by other Europeans, most notably count Eugenio Brunetta d'Usseaux of Italy. Without consulting the "hot" world, the IOC retroactively sanctioned the winter games held in France in 1924 as the "Winter Olympics," in conjunction with the Paris Summer Olympics of that year.

The "Winter Olympics" have been held every year prior to the Summer Olympics until 1992. The IOC decided that the "Winter Olympics" would have better exposure if it were separated from the Summer Olympics. Starting in 1994 in Lillehammer, Norway, the "Winter Olympics" have been held two years

before the Summer Olympics.

The names of the events in the "Winter Olympics" testify to their European bias -- Alpine skiing, Nordic combined, and skijoring, among others. (The equivalent in the summer Olympics would be, "Kenyan Marathon," or the "Jamaican 100 metre race"!)

The rest of the world knows what the events of the Summer Olympics are; they have no clue as to what bobsledding, bandy, and luge mean. An African may dream of winning the 3,000 metres steeple-chase in the summer Olympics; but the thought of cross-country skiing in the "Winter Olympics" leaves him cold. An Indian may dream of winning a medal at field hockey in the summer Olympics, or at cricket if it ever becomes an Olympic sport; he is least excited at the thought of winning "Winter Olympics" Giant Slalom. Can anyone please explain why the slightly comical event called "curling" is a "Winter Olympics" event?

Like in most other areas of the human endeavour these days, the rich and powerful nations do not bother to consult the poor nations before deciding on important issues. The rich nations lead and decide; the poor nations are expected to follow, obey, and not ask questions.

No developing nation was asked whether the "Nordic Games" should be upgraded to the status of an "Olympics." The Europeans just went ahead and did it! If the nations of

the world were asked to vote on the subject today, an overwhelming majority will say that the "Winter Olympics" should not be regarded as Olympics.

Caucasians, down from 28 per cent of the world's population in 1950 to under 20 per cent today, still call all the shots, it seems! Perhaps they should not be so unilateral in their decision-making, and impose their will on the rest of the world so callously. According to demographic estimates, by 2060 they will be less than 10 per cent of the world's population!

This does not mean the winter games should not be held or watched. Of course they should be held and watched. Some of the events, like ski-jumping are exciting and figure skating aesthetic. If the white folks want to have fun, and frolic in the snow and on ice, and the world wants to watch it, that is perfectly all right. But please, do not call it an "Olympics" where the whole world is supposed to participate.

It is not the Olympics, because only a tiny fraction of the world's population can, and do participate in it. Go back to calling these games what they really are. Go back to calling these games by its original name which truly captures what it really is. Go back to calling it the "Nordic Games."

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a Rhodes Scholar and Daily Star columnist.

Parliament: What art thou?

Most importantly, if the past cannot be detached from the present, how will the future discourse be shaped? It is time to let the past be, and let the departed souls, particularly of Bangabandhu and Ziaur Rahman, rest in peace.



HASANUZZAMAN

A parliament is a sacred entity. By itself, it represents something that is beyond the ordinary. Like the heart in a human body, it is the most important organ of a well-functioning democracy.

Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy where executive power is exercised by both the government and the parliament. In the backdrop of the recent incidents in our parliament,

one may be compelled to ask whether we really need a parliament in the first place. Certainly we do, but as the events on February 16 revealed, a major portion of the arguments and debates which took place in the parliament could have been placed on the tea time agenda or an informal gathering!

The walkout on Tuesday was the fifth since the BNP-led alliance returned to the House on February 11, breaking their 10-month boycott of parliamentary proceedings. They had previ-

ously walked out of the House protesting derogatory remarks by the treasury bench members against slain president Ziaur Rahman.

The lawmakers belonging to Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) walked out from the House, not once but twice, on February 16. The first walkout was, according to Moudud Ahmed, a response to the government's "meanness." According to him, the government's decision to change the name of the international airport, given after Ziaur Rahman nearly three decades ago, reflected the government's determination to marginalise the BNP from mainstream politics. The BNP staged a second walkout on the same day when the ruling party's lawmaker, Zillul Hakim, termed Tarjue Rahman a "great thief and champion of corruption."

Such incidents in the parliament truly bemuse the mind of a political analyst! After all, is parliament not an entity where legislative activities are supposed to take place? In plain words, laws and issues of contemporary concern are debated in the parliament, whereby conflict of interests, particularly in the area of policymaking, is reduced and the scope to reach a mutually acceptable decision or solution is enhanced.

However, Bangladesh's parliament is special in the sense that "fusion of powers" is omnipresent in all branches of the government. This is because most of the ministers of the executive branch are drawn from the legislature, such that they are intertwined, whereby the head of the government becomes de facto the chief executive and chief legislator.

The parliamentary system in Bangladesh does not have a precise separation of powers and operates as a unicameral legislative body, leading to a different set of checks and bal-

ances. This causes a fusion of powers, which, in turn, paralyses the functioning of the parliament. Separation of powers, with regard to the judicial and executive branches of the state, was implemented on November 1, 2007 by the caretaker government, though to what extent this has helped the judiciary become impartial and independent is a matter of debate.

A parliament's overarching goal is to provide a check and balance mechanism, restraining individuals or groups from gaining absolute power and thereby protecting dissenting individuals and minority groups from the "tyranny of the majority."

In Tuesday's session, the speaker of the House, Abdul Hamid, urged leaders not to use any words that went against parliamentary values. However, there is no code of conduct governing the usage of words and functional aspects of the parliament. Reiterating Zafar Sobhan's words, "enough, surely, is enough."

Elected leaders, if they cannot focus on improving the state of the country, should at least avoid indulging themselves in debates that do not do anything for country's common citizens. Indeed, Bangladeshis gifted Sheikh Hasina a landslide victory hoping for a better future. Nevertheless, if renaming establishments and constantly revisiting the past by "correcting" the opposition are the only instruments available to the government, who knows where that might lead?

Most importantly, if the past cannot be detached from the present, how will the future discourse be shaped? It is time to let the past be, and let the departed souls, particularly of Bangabandhu and Ziaur Rahman, rest in peace.

Hasanuzzaman is a researcher. He can be reached at hasanuzzaman1984@hotmail.com.