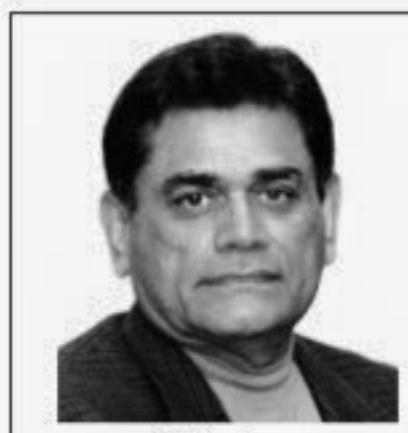


## STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

# Of political leadership, politics, and politicians



Brig Gen  
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

**T**HE issue of leadership in Bangladesh had never lost its topicality, and as a matter of national concern had never

been out of public discourse. Right from the time of our liberation, but more so after the "rebirth" of democracy in the country in 1991, leadership of political parties had been viewed with keen interest by the public, more so when that in certain cases, had been more often thrust on the people rather than acquired by dint of one's merit as a politician. So has been the focus of the public on the quality of politicians. But one would like to emphasise the relevance of pedigree that goes into the making of a good politician and a good leader.

It is regrettable that political demeanour of the top leadership of the major parties has betrayed a predilection for autocratic disposition in treating national as well as party matters. Bad things rub off easily on others, and most regrettably, replication of the behaviour of military autocrats, who wielded power in the country for a good number of years, has characterised the conduct of these leaders. What worries us is that the obnoxious influence has been ubiquitous in our political scene. And this has been eminently exposed in the recent remarks of three one-time important office bearers of the ruling party, related to leadership and quality of politicians in Bangladesh.

While the comments will not endear them to the party, the underlying message should not be lost on the policymakers of the AL. It should neither be mistaken as senseless grumbings of the deprived, because what they have uttered would find resonance in the many that are politi-

cally conscious. However, it is not to say that such a trait is unique to one party only, it pervades the minds of leadership of all the major parties in Bangladesh. And this is not restricted either to the top echelons only but refers to leadership up and down the ladder.

Mr. Jalil, the ex-general secretary of the AL, has been highly critical of the

ment, and perhaps too, those MPs, previously more disposed towards politics, have now thought it better and turned businessmen.

Yes, the MPs have been elected by the people, but what other choice did the voters have? Can we expect otherwise when nominations go to those with surplus of money to fill up the party coffers? In most cases it was

will be no punitive measure against them for talking against party line. The measure is needed so that the parliament remains effective even if the opposition walks out." And what Mr. Jalil said subsequently during the course of his "meet the press" meeting is very relevant too. He said: "There is now a political leadership crisis in the country as leadership was not created in the last 20 years." And that begs the question.

It is also a damning indictment of the politicians when they are found ingratiating themselves to the intelligence agencies, hoping that a favourable word here and there from these agencies might help put them in some position of importance. And this comes from another senior leader of the same party, Mr. Obaidul Quader, whom nobody can accuse of ignorance. And one cannot fail to notice the remorseful remarks of Mr. Tofael Ahmed that political parties no longer breed leaders because they are often inducted rather than bred from the grassroots level.

In our country leaders seldom retire, nor do they think of creating a worthwhile second and third tier of leadership capable of taking over the mantle once the time arrives. And the "time" is open to speculation. This may perhaps have to do with the leaders' misplaced sense of eternity. What that results in is an unwholesome compound resulting from a mix of arrogance, haughtiness, conceit and ego. The impact of it is not only felt by the party, it also impacts the state of governance in the country. The comments of three senior Awami League leaders expose the lack of participatory leadership that is so very important in politics, both for ownership and implementation of decisions, and must be addressed with due diligence.

The writer is Editor, Defense & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.



LISA HANEY

*In our country leaders seldom retire, nor do they think of creating a worthwhile second and third tier of leadership capable of taking over the mantle once the time arrives. And the "time" is open to speculation.*

way the parliament is being hogged by businessmen (perhaps forgetting that he too is one) causing it to become less and less interested in politics while remaining busy with issues extraneous to the parliament and lawmaking. But such is the character that the parliament has acquired over the last few decades. According to declaration of the candidates 57 percent of the MPs in the 9th Parliament are businessmen. No wonder that the businessmen turned politicians are controlling the parlia-

neither political pedigree nor experience that influenced selection of party candidates. That being said, it must be asserted that there cannot be a bar against anyone taking up politics, provided once elected to public office, his or her actions are not motivated by partisan or group interests, a tall order indeed!

It is hardly a compliment to the party leader when its MPs demand, "that ruling party lawmakers be given full freedom of speech in the parliament, with an assurance that there

## Power of new nationalism

NAYAN CHANDA

**T**HE spark that was lit in Tunisia has now spread the brushfire to four countries after consuming Egypt's long-time president Hosni Mubarak. Coming days will show if the Tunisian uprising will become the Arab equivalent of the 1980 Gdansk strike in Poland that brought down the Soviet empire.

Whether the embattled regimes in Yemen, Bahrain and Libya succeed in surmounting street challenge or not, the phoenix of new Arab nationalism emerging from the ashes of fallen regimes promises

to radically alter the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

The sudden flight of Tunisian strongman Ben Ali after 28 days of protest -- the first ever Arab potentate in history to do so -- burst like a thunderclap, thus energising a small band of pro-democracy Arab bloggers and activists. A new generation of educated but mostly unemployed Arab youth (60% of the population) -- who chafed under corrupt, nepotistic and authoritarian regimes all across the Middle East and North Africa -- has had enough of fake Arabism.

Instead of parroting the empty anti-Israeli, anti-American slogans long used by the fundamentally pro-western regimes, the new pan-Arab nationalism has turned them against their rulers. Their chosen tools are not Molotov cocktails but Facebook and Twitter and their playbook a Gandhian primer on non-violent

protest.

The Tunisian and Egyptian youth who made history in bringing down entrenched autocrats through non-violent demonstrations lasting less than a month did not turn to al-Qaida affiliates for training. They read comic books on Martin Luther King's struggle and sought advice from the Serbian students' Otpor revolution that brought down Slobodan Milosevic through non-violent struggle in 2000. Practising Egyptian-style "Gandhigiri," they fraternised with the armed forces, fought back violent pro-Mubarak attackers and with their

cal differences among countries, the call for representative government and end to corruption and nepotism has proved contagious.

For the first time, Arab nationalism is all about building and reforming their own societies, not blaming foreign powers for their ills. A chant developed in Tunisia, and thunderously repeated in Egypt, is being echoed all over the Arab world. It's a polite assertion with serious portent: "The People Demand The Fall of the Regime!"

The laser-like focus on throwing out their own oppressive rulers, their

lite television about the democratising world with a sense of humiliation, the rulers look for dark foreign conspiracy. While activists quietly exchange tips on how to evade government surveillance or function in a teargas cloud, rulers fulminate against shadowy enemies.

Ironically, the violent response by Middle East governments to peaceful demands for freedom and democracy has put the US and European allies in a spot. They are being asked to choose between their economic and security interests and their avowed support for the protesters' democratic demands.

The swiftness of the Arab uprising has taken everybody by surprise. Yet the creation of the tinderbox lit in Tunisia has been a long-time coming. The growing anger and frustration of Arab youth had been evident even to cautious UN bureaucrats. A 2009 UN report pointed to the massive unemployment of the youth, whose alienation was palpable.

Despite the fabulous wealth of their rulers, 20% of the population earns less than two dollars a day. The rulers' failures in governance, it noted, has turned states into "a threat to (Arab) human security, instead of its chief support." The teargas and bullets now being spent by shaven regimes can only add more fuel to the fire of new nationalism.

© Yale Center for Globalization. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.

## Livability rating of Dhaka

*An indictment on city governance*

**D**HAKA makes news once again. This time for wrong reasons though. It has come second only to Harare as the most unlivable city in the world. What a badge to wear, what a distinction! According to a 2011 survey carried out by Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a prestigious research wing of the London based weekly Economist released last week: Dhaka was placed at 139th position out of 140 countries surveyed. The criteria of the standings were based on the following factors: stability, healthcare, environment and culture, education and infrastructure. Out of 100 points at stake Bangladesh could earn only 38.7 points just beating Harare marginally at 37.5. Karachi and Colombo are other two Asian cities that make the last ten. Last year, Dhaka held the same position. What on earth for?

It is a disquietingly hard truth for a city credited with having a long historical legacy and a rich cultural heritage. Dhaka came to be known the world over as the city of mosques, muslim and greens. It attracted travelers from far and near through ages. It had a character of its own which is all but lost now. It was founded as far back as in 1608 A.D. as the seat of the imperial Mughal Viceroy of Bengal.

Today Dhaka is weighed down with insurmountable problems. The population now hovering around 15 million is root cause of all related problems. Mass exodus from rural areas for better opportunities, unplanned growth of roads and housing, strangulating traffic congestion, shortage of gas, electricity and water, environmental pollution caused by vehicles and industries, add to these the social crime and political instability - problems appear to be mounting everyday.

Only way to reverse the situation is to make outskirts of Dhaka and other towns the epicenters of growth, create employment opportunities by way of SMEs, opening of educational institutions, medicare facilities, entertainment outlets like parks, cultural rendezvous of different denominations. Decentralization of the administration has been long over due with self-contained zones of habitats so that people don't have to travel long distances. Dhaka's civic governance should be radically improved by bringing into being a unified city authority.

## Tyranny of quacks

*Need for medicare outreach*

**T**HE plight of a minor boy due to wrong treatment by a village kabiraj (fake healer) at a remote village in Rangpur district has again brought to the fore the vulnerability of poor and ignorant villagers at the hands of impostors and fake healers.

The victim in question is a boy of 11 belonging to a poor household who broke his left arm in a bicycle accident. The boy was taken to the Dimla upazila health complex by his father when agents of Abu kabiraj, ganged up on them and forced them into taking the kabiraj's treatment resulting in severe sepsis in the boy's arm. And thanks to his relative's sympathy and good sense to report the matter to the residential doctor of the upazila and his subsequent intervention that proper treatment could be arranged for the boy at the Rangpur Medical College Hospital. Thus the boy's life could be saved.

Considering the circumstances of the child's predicament, it is a mere stroke of good luck that he finally could receive proper treatment. Otherwise his fate would be like that of numberless others whose miseries never come to light.

What is of utmost concern is that the victim and his father were virtually under duress to take the fake healer's treatment. As the story goes, the quack's agents took advantage of the fact that the upazila health complex was closed when the wounded boy and his father arrived there.

The misery of the young boy and his parents again demonstrates the callousness of the health complex authorities in question, on the one hand, and poor accessibility as well as paucity of primary healthcare services in the outlying villages, on the other. Ignorance and superstition of the villagers compound their predicaments further.

While there is a crying need for creating necessary awareness and spreading education among the villagers so that they may keep fake healers and fraudsters at arm's length, it is also important that primary healthcare services have to be expanded into deep interiors of the country.

Finally, the fake healer Abu and his cohorts deserve to be arrested and awarded exemplary punishment for

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 24

**1826**  
Treaty of Yandabo, the peace treaty that ended the First Anglo-Burmese War, nearly two years after the war formally broke out on 5 March 1824, signed. The Burmese were forced to accept the British terms without discussion. According to the treaty, the Burmese agreed to cede to the British Assam, Manipur, Arakan and Tenasserim coast south of Salween River.

**1868**  
Andrew Johnson becomes the first President of the United States to be impeached by the United States House of Representatives. He was later acquitted in the Senate.

**1920**  
The Nazi Party founded when Adolf Hitler presented his National Socialist program in Munich.

**1968**  
South Vietnamese recapture Hue, the country's third city, after a battle lasting three weeks.

**1971**  
UK announces new Immigration Bill that took away the Commonwealth citizens' automatic right to remain in the UK.

**1989**  
Ayatollah Khomeini offers a USD \$3 million bounty for the death of The Satanic Verses author Salman Rushdie.

**2008**  
Fidel Castro retires as the President of Cuba after nearly fifty years.

**Birth**  
**1304**  
Ibn Battuta, Arabian explorer (d. c.1368)

**Death**  
**1953**  
Gerd von Rundstedt, German field marshal (b. 1875). Among his many appoints was Commander of the Army Group South in the Poland campaign. He was charged with war crimes, but never faced trial due to his poor health. He was released from captivity in 1948.



AFP

*Whether the embattled regimes in Yemen, Bahrain and Libya succeed in surmounting street challenge or not, the phoenix of new Arab nationalism emerging from the ashes of fallen regimes promises to radically alter the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.*

uncompromising stand forced Mubarak to step down.

The youthful protesters in Tunisia and Egypt upended Nasserite authoritarian, statist secularism, embracing in its place a true secularism based on freedom of expression, human dignity and social justice. The yearning for democratic rule that marked the new nationalism thus rose above the struggle of Tunisia and Egypt and energised youth across the Arab land. Despite significant social and politi-

secularism (Coptic Christians standing guard while Muslim protesters prayed in Tahrir Square), their civic-mindedness (distributing food, providing medical care and cleaning the Square) and their call for social justice and equity have created a totally new challenge for the ruling monarchs, military establishment and business elites.

Unable to fathom the younger generation that has grown up in an interconnected world watching satel-