

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Message from the foiled plot



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THIS is no laughing matter. Even so, one may not quite resist the temptation of an

Adlai Stevenson quote couched in humour: "A politician is a statesman who approaches every question with an open mouth."

But isn't silence golden when an investigation is on into a serious attempted incident of subversion brought to public light last Thursday? Of course, the next best will be restrained talking so as not to even unwittingly influence the course of investigation.

If the temper and nature of any issue should demand effective and focused handling then it must be the foiled coup plot. One may ask whether the timing has had anything to do with the attempt, is it linked to overall political ambience or how far of an outreach there was to it? These questions keep exercising the public mind.

The court of inquiry constituted by the Armed Forces on December 28, 2011, and complemented by the various intelligence agencies to unearth elaborate information about the plot and its proceedings

is at work in full swing. A complete picture will only emerge after the inquisition reaches its conclusions and the salient findings are made public. Let's be patient.

It is in everybody's interest, more so that of the army and for sustenance of democracy that the perceived fault-line through which fanaticism tried to make an inroad into a disciplined force is sealed.

Bangladesh chapter of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, banned since October 22, 2010, is said to have circulated provocative leaflets based on fugitive Major Syed Ziaul Haq's internet message throughout the country. Hizb-ut-Tahrir is under the scanner and supposedly vestigial remnants of other extremist groups are likewise under surveillance.

Granted, the conspiratorial incident has been of such a nature that it could trigger a measure of political debate. It is understandable that each party will have party-line reactions. Should any political party, however, try to make a political capital out of it by even unwittingly dragging the army into any controversy, it would only be counter-productive. All stakeholders will only stand to lose.



Compared with the transformational situations in Arab states, Pakistan, and to some extent, Myanmar, Bangladesh can regard itself as being politically better off. But beware of trouble-mongers who wait in the wings to fish in the muddy water and thus attempt to take that bit of shine off our sheen.

The way our politicians are dealing with the plot and its aftermath leaves one feeling they need to put a leash on their tongue.

The ruling party Awami League (AL) has been quick at finger-pointing to the opposi-

tion Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). AL accused BNP of having had a hand in the aborted conspiracy. Indian newspaper *Anandabazar* in a report hinted at Tareq Zia's possible role in the plot.

The prime minister has even quipped in a public meeting: "Now one could try and guess what Khaleda Zia had meant by prophesying this government's fall by December."

The BNP, while rejecting the accusations, has suggested that the government better keep from what it termed "playing a dangerous game by using the army as a political weapon." The party says in so many words that something of an old issue has been brought up to divert public attention from pressing issues at hand. But Begum Zia's allusion to alleged "disappearance" from the army, however, added fuel to speculation.

Most people think that unearthing of the plot rather than hushing it up has been a good thing. In a democracy that is how it should be, especially in matters concerning national security and stability of a constitutional government. Remember, despite some kind of a prescience, the then Bangladesh Rifles, or for that matter the home ministry, could not head off the heinous murder of army officers within Peelkhana complex.

Countering BNP's reactions Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam maintained that the BNP in a consistent pattern

of conspiratorial politics, ridden with killings and coups, have "tarnished" the image of the glorious Armed Forces. As if not to be left behind, Mirza Fakhrul Islam flatly said that BNP never came to power through conspiracy or military takeover. He even claimed that the Awami League had been associated with most army coup-d-etats. This is taking political tirade to a most mind-boggling level.

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Unity and the integrity of the Armed Forces is a prized possession for any sovereign and independent country. So, political parties for their part will have to ensure that the army is kept free of any strains to realise its full potential as a professional and modern military force as they themselves maximise their internal vigil. They have matured and the process of their maturation needs to be bolstered.

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Sixty-third Republic Day of India

SANJAY BHATTACHARYYA

I extend my warm greetings to the friendly people of Bangladesh and to my fellow countrymen living here.

On January 26, the anniversary of the day when the Constitution of India came into effect, all Indians celebrate with pride the principles of democracy, secularism and social and economic empowerment, which are enshrined in the Constitution and have taken deep root in our country.

India stands on the cusp of a historic transformation. Our democratic traditions empower our citizens; our diversity and pluralism enrich our culture and our respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms add vitality to our nation. It is our vision to promote inclusive growth and deliver the benefits of development to every citizen in every village in our country. The strong performance of our economy and a return to a high growth trajectory has given a huge boost to all-round development.

Today, the world looks at India as a vibrant civilisation and also as an engine of economic growth and social change that serves as a model to address the challenges facing the emerging global order.

India and Bangladesh enjoy enduring bonds of history, language and culture. We share a commitment to democracy, pluralism and rule of law. Our bilateral relations are witnessing a new dawn with multifaceted cooperation for mutual benefit. The path-breaking visits of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India in 2010 and of our prime minister to Bangladesh a few months ago, as also the recent visit by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Tripura are a manifestation of our conviction in a shared future and our commitment to work together for our common objectives.

During the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Bangladesh, in September 2011, our leaders agreed on a new architecture for bilateral partnership. We have put in place a comprehensive framework of cooperation for development of the two countries and outlined our shared vision for the future. This not only addresses long pending issues but also focuses on steps to provide benefit to the people of

both countries.

Our shared vision has opened new vistas of bilateral cooperation, strengthened regional cooperation within South Asia and has set an example of good neighbourly relations. With the signing of a Protocol to the Land Boundary Agreement of 1974 both countries have now demarcated the entire land boundary as well as resolved the status of enclaves and adversely possessed areas. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited the Tin Bigha area to witness the implementation of 24-hour access to the enclaves of

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Dahagram-Angarpota through the Tin Bigha area. India has provided duty free access to almost all Bangladesh goods, to signal our belief that promoting trade and investment relations helps build stronger bilateral ties. The joint celebrations to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote the national anthems of both countries, has brought our people closer as have enhanced cultural, academic and youth exchanges.

Bangladesh too is in the midst of a major socio-economic transformation. Its economy has witnessed steady growth during the last several years and she has achieved significant success in eradicating poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease. These are achievements Bangladesh can be justly proud of. India is privileged to be a partner in Bangladesh's agenda for economic development. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in an address at the University of Dhaka said: "Bangladesh is an important voice of the developing world. It has much to say and contribute in the comity of nations and the affairs of the world. India will support Bangladesh's efforts to play its due and commensurate role in regional and global affairs."

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the friendly people and the government of Bangladesh for their support to strengthen the traditional bonds of friendship between us and look forward to their continuing cooperation to implement the shared vision of a brighter future for our peoples.

I wish you all a peaceful, happy, successful and prosperous year ahead.

The writer is His Excellency, the Acting High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh.

An open letter to Obaidul Quader and Suranjit Sengupta

HUSSAIN IMAM

HONOURABLE ministers, we were very happy when you took charge of the two most important ministries, Communication and Railway, last month replacing Janab Abul Hossain who not only annoyed the public by his tall talks and no action but also embarrassed the government by his failure to handle the Padma Bridge issue in a transparent manner.

People were vocal against the inaction of Abul Hossain and wanted his replacement much earlier. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, to everybody's surprise, took much longer than expected in taking a decision on the matter.

However, better late than never, she was finally convinced that he should be removed from the communication ministry and, accordingly, she has not only done that but also rightly divided the ministry into two -- making railway a separate ministry -- and placed two of her party's most veteran leaders in charge of the two ministries.

Honourable ministers, you must not forget this background of your elevation to this position. You must not also forget that you too were also very vocal against the inaction and indifference of the communication ministry towards addressing the public sufferings that reached beyond any limit of tolerance.

It is now your turn to prove by your action that you had valid reasons to cry hoarse against the inaction of the government on certain issues, especially of the communication sector. You have to really show by your deeds that you believe in action, not in tall talk.

Every other day your predecessor would appear before the television camera and tell us about a new project that his ministry was going to implement. He would tell us today of Padma Bridge, tomorrow about metro rail, the next day of an elevated expressway. We listened to his lullaby and went to sleep, only to wake up next morning and realise that it was but a day-dream. We don't want to be fooled by these lullabies any more. We have had enough of dreams.

What we want now are actions that will address the day-to-day sufferings of the public in the transport sector. We want to see some pragmatic steps taken by your departments so that the people can be relieved of the constant fear and agony of scarcity of transport facilities on one hand and traffic jam, road accidents and abnormally high transport cost on the other.

Because of lack of planning, negligence, corruption and utter indifference towards the needs of the people from people that mattered most at the policy and the implementation level of the successive governments of the past, the communication and transport sector is now a complete mess.

Rail and river transport which were once the lifelines of

the communication sector have been neglected on purpose by our rulers, policy makers and planners. They have preferred serving the interest of the vested quarters to that of the people and paid all their attention to the development of the road sector, leaving river and rail communication to gradually shrink and die.

The result is what we see now -- anarchy in the transport sector. Roads and highways are narrow, dilapidated and unsafe, needing huge fund for repair and expansion that the country can ill afford. Traveling has become hazardous. Everyday, on average, 18 persons are losing their lives in road accidents. Traffic jams in the cities are making the lives of the city dwellers hell. Transport cost is all time high. Extortion is the order of the day.

It is heartening to note the prime minister has realised the importance of the railway sector, made it a separate ministry and given charge of the ministry to a veteran leader like Suranjit Sengupta. We hope he will do his best and justify the trust and confidence she has reposed on him.

As for the honourable minister for communication, sir, you have so many jobs to take care of. You have to repair and expand the country's national highways and minimise the road accidents. You have to repair the bridges. You have to ease the traffic congestion of the cities, stop extortion and convince the bus and truck owners not to overload their vehicles and charge fare higher than the rate fixed by the government.

You have also to implement projects like Padma Bridge, metro rail, elevated expressway, flyovers and so on. It is undeniably a Herculean task and certainly not possible to complete in the present term of your government. But if you can even start the construction work of these projects within this period it will be a great job.

At the age of 66, as a citizen of Dhaka city, I have only the following demands to the honourable ministers:

- Repair and construct footpaths and free them from all sorts of obstacles so that the pedestrians can walk without any anxiety. If people can smoothly walk on the footpaths, demand for rickshaws will be greatly diminished and that will certainly help in easing the traffic jams;
- Rickshaw and CNG are the only modes of transport for the middle or limited income people residing in the city. Both have become too costly. Rickshaws are considered one of the main causes of traffic jam. They are also considered health hazard for those pulling them and need to be gradually phased out. Alternative is an efficient and rapid mass transport system, but it will take time to build it. Till then why not have sufficient number of CNGs and taxicabs and ensure that they run on meter?
- A shuttle train service from Gazipur to Narayanganj via Dhaka should ply every 15 minutes.

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