

UAE barring entry of Bangladeshis en masse How could Bangladeshi mission be caught unawares?

IN what may be termed as nothing short of a dramatic step, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has stopped the issue of all forms of entry permits for Bangladeshi passport holders due to security concerns over identification and fake documents. What came as a greater shock is that our officials in the Bangladesh mission in Abu Dhabi have expressed ignorance over the issue. The move by UAE authorities is not altogether surprising given the fact that earlier in August the country imposed entry restrictions for our citizens as evidence mounted on the steadily increasing usage of forged travel documents, expired passports and issue of overstay beyond visa timeline.

These concerns have been raised by UAE but we failed to address them properly. Now we are faced with the prospect of one hopes not, of losing one of our most important labour destinations which employs about a million expatriate Bangladeshi workers. The move in August should have been a wake-up call for the government especially since manpower export to UAE recorded a sharp decline of nearly 43 per cent in August over that of July with some 15,771 people finding employment there. The news got even worse in September when a mere 2,000 Bangladeshi workers found work in UAE. Even if this bar is a temporary one, redoubled efforts must be made to contain the irregularities.

From what has been published in the Gulf News, the crux of the problem revolves around fake passports and visas. With the government-to-government labour market deal yet to be finalised between Bangladesh and Malaysia; and UAE authorities not stating precisely when the ban will be lifted, there are bound to be serious concerns here. The misgivings raised by UAE are not unique. They are almost identical to the ones raised by Malaysia and unless we are willing to treat these anomalies on top priority basis, we are looking at the prospect of undercutting our \$1,300 crore annual remittance basket.

Private school and college teachers' demands

The longer these go unmet, greater will be the complications

THE fact that some 70,000 teachers of around 7,000 non-government schools and colleges have been receiving their salaries irregularly, some even for more than a decade, is an educational problem with a human dimension. Underlying all this, is of course, education ministry's, or for that matter, government's failure to grapple with the bread and butter issue impacting on their professional work with timely interventions so that these did not go out of control.

In this context, we note that on Thursday, the day before the World Teachers' Day, teachers and employees of private institutions agitating for government salary support near the secretariat met with stiff resistance from the police. They were subjected to baton charging as well as teargas shelling resulting in injuries on 20-25 teachers.

Such highhandedness on the part of the police has evoked sympathetic sentiments from education minister Nurul Islam Nahid towards the teachers: "We do not want respected teachers' community to be harassed for their demands." He has assured a meeting with finance minister to devise a solution. The teachers in the meanwhile suspended their programme on an assurance of a meeting with the prime minister. If this approach had been adopted earlier the trouble could have been avoided.

As a matter of fact, the institutions themselves are severely cash-trapped while the government which could ease their constraints faces fund crunch. The AL government having revived the MPO facility after six years in limbo, in fulfillment of its electoral pledge, listed 1,624 private secondary and higher secondary schools and colleges for MPO. The remainder more than 5,000 institutions being thus left out, their teachers are pressing for inclusion under MPO.

A balance needs to be struck between the government's capacity, which needs to be a bit more stretched, and the pressing nature of the teachers' demands. The government appears to have opted for a phase-by-phase approach but has not tagged it to a timeframe; that is where we believe uncertainty creeps in. The teachers' sense of insecurity can be allayed through assurances of clear-cut timeline for rendering salary support to reasonably functioning institutions. Meanwhile, some ways must

Bi-partisanship imperative



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IN our disturbingly charged political climate, even the incorrigible optimists might scoff at discussions

geared towards inculcating a bi-partisan approach in our political culture. They cannot be faulted as one sees a menacingly manifest partisan posture in all the discourses affecting public life.

So sharp is the polarisation and so acrimonious are the deliberations that one might not realise that we are citizens of a democratic republic.

Whatever be the ground reality, thoughts of bi-partisanship shall inevitably engage the discerning minds. The reasons are simple because a nation which is constitutionally united to a degree but perilously politically disintegrated shall never have the inner strength which is so necessary to sustain in adversity or to progress towards prosperity.

We cannot deny that in Bangladesh we need much more of the spirit of moderation. This moderation should be reflective of a temper that will not press a partisan advantage to its bitter end. For democracy's sake and for development, the desirable political behaviour should be the one that understand and respect the other side and is appreciative of the unity between all citizens.

The above may sound wishful thinking or fruitless entreaties in our increasingly confrontational political interactions. The fact, however, remains that democratic functioning would depend upon habits of consent and compromise that are attributes only of mature political societies.

The question is: Is that maturity achievable without gradually acclimatising to a bi-partisan approach in public affairs?

One has to admit that a lawful government by the majority, under the rule of abiding law, and with freedom of opposition and dissent is a difficult

human achievement. This observation has a special meaning in our socio-political scenario where some quarters till now strongly believe that democracy does not suit the genius of our reactive polity. They have to be proven wrong. However, if the spirit of bi-partisanship does not prevail, our society will surely degenerate into divisions and hatred would replace goodwill. The cynics would have cause to be elated.

Bipartisanship to be workable in our political culture has to take note of the ground reality wherein there is an overriding necessity of a one-to-one dialogue between the two supreme leaders of the two major political parties of the country. This aspect assumes special significance

commitment to Bangladesh's political identity as a sovereign democratic republic has to be unequivocally ensured.

That while criminal activities in support of political objective have to be punished, the emerging political change has to be recognized in the light of the reality warranted by irreversible circumstances.

That contribution to war of liberation by all concerned has to be recognised in true measures and political history of the country has to be recorded in proper perspective.

And last but not the least both parties display the magnanimity to acknowledge the aberrations caused to the polity by their respective policy and action.

Let us remember that the modern

So sharp is the polarisation and so acrimonious are the deliberations that one might not realise that we are citizens of a democratic republic.

when quite clearly the two leaders are not in any meaningful communication.

It is pertinent to note that the politics of summity whether in the international parlance or on the domestic plane require painstaking homework to sort out the thorny issues, may be not all in one go, to enable the supreme leaders to arrive at a desirable outcome.

As far as the dialogue of our two principal leaders is concerned, the first task may be to thrash out some common agreements through the wisdom of our political leaders who should be able to arrive at a bare reducible minimum.

Thereafter, the leaders may engage in meaningful discussion, aided and supported by the civil society with tacit backup from friendly quarters.

To facilitate bipartisanship the leaders may agree on the following:

That assassination or murder for political or any objective cannot be condoned and the guilty must be brought under the law.

That complete and unconditional

State is a contrivance for civilised people to lead a lawful life. The impartial and dispassionate performance of some vital institutions ensures the success of such an existence. Prominent among those are the judiciary, the education system, public service, the media whose lively and positive actions guarantee the fulfillment of societal goals and maintenance of its vitality.

Of late, we hear ominous utterances of "Failed State" and "Failed Government."

If we do not want this denigration and debasement then we must ensure the paternal care of the vital institutions. This sacred responsibility falls principally on the politicians who, however, have to be

strongly and actively supported by the judiciary and the media, amongst others.

If merit is not accorded its due in the education system, economic activities are prejudiced by partisan considerations, appointments in public service are politically influenced, it would not be possible to halt

the polarisation and the divisive trends, and at some point of time the grim scenario of "failed state" might become a reality.

Coming to specifics, there are several issues of governance in our parlance wherein bi-partisanship is expected to deliver publicly beneficial outcomes. Unhealthy influence on public services that mars professionalism and ultimately impact dispassionate service delivery should be an area of utmost concern. If politicians across the divide display the desired bi-partisan approach in the creation and nurturing of the correct service ethos befitting the public servants of the republic, we would be stopping a harmful practice.

We would only do ourselves a service by remembering that in an independent nation, leaders build the institutions and in due course of time those institutions produce the leaders. There is, therefore no time to tinker with the institutions. They should be allowed to grow to promote and sustain democracy. The specter of stateless society in some parts of the world should serve as a grave reminder.

We are perhaps losing sight of the fact that democracy cannot be limited to the holding of election, convening the parliament and formation of council of ministers only. The reality is that democracy is a way of life wherein we must have the courage to listen to a different opinion, the tolerance to respect the views by everyone on religion-culture-language and the patience to obey the rule of law. A free media, an independent judiciary and strong regulatory institutions in their rightful glorious places are the hallmarks of a free society.

In our efforts towards establishing bipartisanship and thus ushering a healthy polity the leaders may have to accept painful compromises.

However, we may draw inspiration from our prophet (PBUH) who accepted many unjust conditions for promoting peace in the greater interest of Islam. His sagacity is our guide.

The writer is a columnist for *The Daily Star*.

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

How Karzai could make himself a hero

JIM MARSHALL

EVERY four years Americans are reminded that presidential politics is raw, nasty and rough-and-tumble. We yearn for the time to pass quickly, for the votes to be cast, for the sniping to end, for life to return to normal. For Afghans, things are starkly and sadly different.

During my latest visit to Afghanistan, a few weeks ago, I spoke with government officials, tribal leaders, intellectuals and ordinary citizens. Nearly all worried that too little time remained to properly prepare for a presidential election by the spring of 2014, and they feared that if the election is seen as illegitimate, it could start a civil war.

Their fears are rooted in Afghanistan's history, and they make sense today. Afghanistan is still a fractured country, divided principally among four main ethnic groups, each of which speaks a different language; in addition, it is split among urban and rural interests, modernizing and traditional attitudes, and various political groups that churn these differences.

President Hamid Karzai was re-elected in a flawed election in 2009, as was the current Parliament in 2010. A peaceful, democratic transfer of power would be a first for a modern Afghan chief executive: Six were deposed between 1973 and 1992, and of those, five were killed.

Yet there are reasons to hope for a viable election, if election preparations accelerate immediately. Despite the significant electoral fraud in past

elections, Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission is gaining experience and showing increasing competence. With assistance from the international community, and if politicians allow it to do its job, it can do the technical work required to deliver fair elections.

But only one politician can truly assure the commission's independence and success: Hamid Karzai. He is a courageous man with whom I have met several times, although not on this last trip. He cannot seek re-election, and so he stands in a perfect position now to secure his place in Afghan history by insuring that future

perceived to be balanced and impartial.

That would show an early and decisive commitment to a truly democratic election.

As for the United States, its current policy is, correctly, to insist on a fair electoral process without taking sides in the contest. But that goal must be pursued more urgently. The Afghans I spoke to felt strongly that the United States should already be pressing the government and the international community for a final plan for fair elections; it should also provide the necessary support to guarantee its execution.

The decisions Karzai makes now, including his appointments of electoral commissioners and his deference to the commission's work, will be the last and truest test of his statesmanship.

elections will be more fair and credible than past ones have been.

The decisions Karzai makes now, including his appointments of electoral commissioners and his deference to the commission's work, will be the last and truest test of his statesmanship. As a politician and a citizen, he will have every right to campaign for his preferred candidate. But as the country's chief executive, he has a duty to act now to ensure a fair election whose results are broadly accepted. So he should consult with opposition figures on the naming of the next electoral commissioners, and appoint a commission that is widely

The Afghans I spoke to acknowledged that strong American pressure might be denounced as interference with Afghanistan's sovereign rights. But for the vast majority of Afghans, they argued, anything less than forceful, visible American leadership would be viewed as tacit United States support for an electoral process that gives unfair advantages to some ethnic groups or individuals.

"Existential stakes trump niceties," said one Afghan political activist, noting that the United States and its allies are currently responsible for the major part of Afghanistan's security and economy.

The options facing Afghanistan and its allies are stark. Unless a credible election legitimizes a successor to Karzai, Afghanistan's fragile political order will most likely implode, followed by the disintegration of its security forces, a renewal of harsh civil war and the resurgence of Taliban forces. These threats explain why both the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed by the Afghan and United States governments in May and the Mutual Accountability Framework agreed upon by Afghanistan and numerous donors in Tokyo in July made clear that future aid for Afghanistan will depend upon successful elections and improved democratic governance.

Under those agreements, rigging the elections or failing to hold them would almost certainly lead to sharp reductions in foreign aid, which could in turn wreak havoc with Afghanistan's economy and add to political instability and armed conflict.

A great deal of technical work will have to be done, in not much time, to correct serious problems with the voter registry and to assure both security and a level political playing field. Mostly, what Afghans need now is forceful leadership from their president to let them fairly choose his successor. Given Afghanistan's history, such an achievement would be heroic. Karzai should be that hero.

The writer, a former US representative from Georgia, is the president of the United States Institute of Peace.

©New York Times. Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 6

1923

The great powers of World War I withdraw from Istanbul

1928

Chiang Kai-Shek becomes Chairman of the Republic of China.

1939

World War II: The last Polish army is defeated.

1973

Arab states attack Israeli forces. Heavy fighting erupts between Arab and Israeli forces along two fronts as Egypt and Syria attempt to re-take land occupied since 1967.

1981

Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat was assassinated.