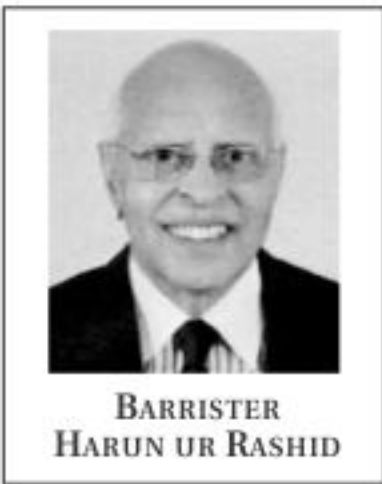


BOTTOM LINE

Tough time ahead for new South Korean president



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

MS. Park Geun-hye, the first woman to lead South Korea, succeeds President Lee Myung-bak, of the same Saenuri Party, who stepped down as the law required after a five-year term. She is the daughter of former military strongman Park Chung-hee, who ruled South Korea for almost two decades.

Ms. Park, who defeated liberal and human rights activist, Moon Jae-in in the December's presidential election, took the oath of office on February 25.

Many people of the "50s/60s generation" supported her because she held her head high and joined politics after her mother and father were assassinated. She has not married, and is fully committed to the welfare of the people.

She takes office amid high tensions on the Korean peninsula in the wake of a North Korean nuclear test on February 12. In her inauguration speech, Ms. Park said she would "not tolerate any action that threatens the lives of our people and the security of our nation."

Park promised a tough stance on national security and an era of economic revival as she was sworn in as South Korea's president.

Her challenges include:

- Reviving the economy;
- Removing gross income inequality among rich and poor, and
- Managing North Korea and removing South Korea's concerns

South Korea's economic growth has slowed, the population is rapidly ageing, and demands for a fairer

division of wealth are now being voiced on both sides of the political divide, reports the BBC's Lucy Williamson from Seoul.

Although South Korean economy is the 15th in the world, and Asia's 4th largest, the income disparity between the rich and poor is stark. Furthermore, people are unhappy over education and employment prospects for the youth.

Since 2006, the number of residents living in relative poverty has jumped 10%. In October last year, the Bank of Korea, the nation's central bank, lowered its growth forecast for next year to 2.4% from its previous prediction of 3%. Almost one-fifth of the population earns less than half the national average income, according to Statistics Korea, a government agency.

In a speech at the headquarters of her Saenuri political party on February 21, she invoked a phrase coined by her father, who also served as president and encouraged the people to pull South Korea out of poverty. "I would like to re-create the miracle of 'let's live well' so people can worry less about their livelihood and young people can happily go to work," Park said.

After assuming presidency, she said South Koreans stood at a new juncture, confronting the difficulties of the global financial crisis as well as the threat from the North. "I will usher in a new era of hope whereby the happiness of each citizen becomes the bedrock of our nation's strength, which in turn is shared by and benefits all Koreans," she said.

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Ms. Park promised more focus on a "creative economy" founded in "economic democratisation" that would expand beyond existing markets and sectors. Policies would be formulated to help small and medium-sized enterprises flourish. She has to compete with products of the Japanese companies which are becoming competitive again globally because of the fall of Japanese currency (20%) against dollar.

Ms. Park said: "By rooting out various unfair practices and rectifying the misguided habits of the past, we will provide active support to ensure that everyone can live up to their fullest potential," she added, in an apparent nod to resentment towards the country's giant "*chaebol*" conglomerates.

She also promised a "clean, transparent and competent government."

"I will endeavour to shed popular distrust of government and strive to elevate the capital of trust," she said.

Calling on North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions, she said that in a challenging security environment South Korea could not "afford to remain where we are."

She visited the North Korean capital in 2002 and met with its late leader Kim Jong Il. Since then, his son Kim Jong Un has taken over in Pyongyang, continuing a policy of defiant work on the country's budding nuclear programme, including a test earlier this month that drew widespread international condemnation.

A trust-building process was needed, she said, promising to move forward "step-by-step on the basis of

credible deterrence." "Trust can be built through dialogue and by honouring promises that have already been made," she said. "It is my hope that North Korea will abide by international norms and make the right choice so that the trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula can move forward."

North Korea's nuclear test -- its third -- followed its apparently successful launch of a three-stage rocket to put a satellite into orbit in December. That launch was condemned by the US Security Council as a banned test of missile technology; diplomatic efforts to agree on a response to the nuclear test are ongoing.

Ties between the two Koreas chilled considerably under President Lee Myung-bak over his move to link aid to concessions on the nuclear issue. Ahead of the election, Ms. Park had spoken out on the need for more dialogue but the recent nuclear test may make it harder for her to appear conciliatory towards Pyongyang, observers say.

Her success as president will be measured how she addresses the vital issues mentioned in earlier paragraphs. Moreover, being aware of the fact that younger Koreans and residents of the key southwestern region (Cholla) voted overwhelmingly for her rival human rights activist Moon Jae-in, Ms. Park is likely to pursue her conservative policy with due care and moderation.

Park Geun-hye made history by becoming South Korea's first female president in a deeply patriarchal country. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, South Korea ranks 108 among 135 countries in terms of gender inequality.

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Private universities: Recruiting ground for extremists?

ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

WHILE public universities have been at the forefront of student politics for decades, private universities are insulated from politics. The students are free from political division, violence and external political interference, which are quite common in public varsities. Though student politics is not allowed on campus, it would be quite naïve to imagine, in fact it should not be expected, that students in private universities will have no political opinion of their own. But what is not allowed is organising themselves under the banner of various students' fronts.

To nurture students' views on national and international issues, as well as build leadership qualities in them, the universities have students' clubs and forums where debates and discussions are held and various competitions are organised. Some universities regularly organise open house where the administrative and academic heads meet cross-section of students who can put forward their complaints and suggestions on academic and administrative issues. Thereby, the university authority can address the issues before they become a major problem.

However, this idyllic picture has been shattered after the arrest of 5 North South University (NSU) students on charge of killing of Rajib, who's murder has resulted in political and social upheaval as he is believed to have been slain by Jamaat e Islami activists. It has also been reported in the press that these students allegedly had connection with Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), a banned Islamist organisation. Their handler, who is yet to be identified, is suspected to be a senior student of the university and a cadre of Islami Chatra Shibir (ICS).

The news was filtering in for quite some time that organisations such as HuT or ICS had infiltrated into the student bodies of private universities. Of the HuT activists arrested in the recent past, a disproportionately large number were found to be from private universities.

If we analyse this, we may identify a number of reasons why HuT picked private universities as their recruiting ground. HuT believes in establishing a worldwide Islamic state run by a Caliph who exercises absolute authority over his domain. It believes that the Muslim majority states are all *Daarul Kuffar* (land of infidels). These Muslim majority countries will have to be converted into *Daarul Islam* (land of Islam) first by *Dawa* i.e. preaching, and if that failed, by an armed struggle called *Jihad*. HuT terms non-Muslim countries as *Daarul Harb* (land of war) with whom at some opportune moment we must engage in *jihad* to turn them into *Daarul Islam*.

While this fantasised world-view of Islam does not take into cognisance the socio-political reality of the world today, it appeals to young minds, especially those who had no education on the evolution of societies and states and of the history and culture of Bangladesh. It was no surprise, therefore, to see that these students were mostly from Islamic medium background and studying science and engineering subjects. HuT particularly targets

students from upper and upper-middleclass background, because through them they stand a better chance of bringing about the changes they desire in the state and the society.

It has also been seen that some teachers who have spent time in some western countries return imbibed with HuT, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Islamic Brotherhood or even Saudi-Salafi ideology that is proliferating among the immigrant Muslim population in the west, but is quite alien to Bangladesh. These teachers are also responsible for influencing the minds of the young students. We need to take appropriate measures to safeguard our youths from these corrupting ideas. Let us discuss some of these measures:

- Just like the Quomi madrasa system, English medium education gives little or no exposure to Bangladeshi history, culture and tradition. The students grow up with no pride in the motherland and easily fall for an exotic ideology. The government must take a serious look at the academic programmes of English medium schools;
- Students must have a good range of co-curricular activities of games and sports, adventure, historical tours, visit to the museums and cultural centres. They must have a thorough exposure to our recent history, especially of the Liberation War of 1971, and issues associated with it;
- Students must be exposed to the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the world. While we emphasise on religious education from our childhood, there is little or no education on ethics. That is a serious lacuna in our education system that must be addressed. Ethics, culture and social studies must be included in all programmes, especially in science and engineering schools;
- Lectures, seminars, debates bringing out the fatal consequences of extremist ideas should be organised on a regular basis by the university. Eminent personalities may be invited to deliver motivational speech to the students;
- New teachers must go through proper verification before the final recruitment. Selections should combine background checking;
- The monitoring system, both electronic and physical, within the university must be strengthened. Prayer hall, library, cafeteria and other common spaces must be brought under surveillance so that no group or individual can use these spaces for propagating extremist ideas;
- Close liaison must be maintained by the university administration with state security agencies to guard against infiltration of extremists and terrorists.

The country now faces multi-dimensional threat to national security. The ideological threat is no less than the physical threat. Private universities, which are new yet vibrant institutions, must not go off track and wither away. The threat of infiltration of extremist ideas into these institutions must be taken care of systematically and comprehensively.

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The writer is a retired Air Commodore.

Terrorism and violence in Bangladesh

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

WHEN the young people demanding more appropriate punishment for the war criminals launched a movement at Shahbagh chattr (square) some compared it to the Tahrir Square of Cairo. The events of Dhaka were unique. The analogy is inappropriate since the Arab Spring was a movement against dictatorial regime to establish democracy and freedom. The non-violent movement launched by the Shadinota Projonmo at Shahbagh was not a movement against the government of the day. In fact, the protestors and the government were on the same side of the embattled historical divide that marks Bangladesh today.

Many of the young picketers were the children (literally, or ideologically) of the freedom fighters in Bangladesh's War of Liberation.

As the political violence launched by the Jamaat-e-Islam and their thugs with support of the BNP, and the somewhat botched response from the police, creates an atmosphere of terror, rampant violence and rising death tolls, people may start comparing Bangladesh with Syria before long. Again, the situations are not analogous at all but some people with a penchant for exaggeration and given to hyperbole will accept the analogies.

Commentators from afar, despite the availability of information, do not care to evaluate the events as to who is right and who is wrong; who is to be blamed and so on. They are concerned about the violence and instability in Bangladesh, which may have serious political and economic repercussions.

Some will remark with a hint of "I told you so" that countries with low per capita income or Muslim countries are not ready for democracy. The reputation Bangladesh has gained for its sustained economic growth and remarkable achievements in social development would be on the back burner.

The tragedy of Bangladesh has many dimensions. The rise of the Jamaat-e-Islam and the rise of a fanatical brand of Islam compounded by a delusion that "we are a secular country." The trouble is that many of the self-deluded are well-meaning people, who fall prey to their own delusions.

Senior political leaders are making inflammatory statements. Political leaders of all shades are trying to take advantage of the present situation. The mounting casualties of the police force are an aspect of the poor governance in

Bangladesh. When the Jamaat picketers set fire to a train, they are not engaged in a political act. More than acts of vandalism committed by thugs, the attacks on the rural electric facilities as in Kansat, Rajshahi, disruption of road links in Chittagong, uprooting of railways tracks, torching of houses and stores of political rivals, are acts of war carried out by the terrorists.

When supporters of a political party -- Jamaat - - destroy public property and endanger public safety, their leaders can be brought to justice for fomenting violence. Both the acts and words of violence should be treated as crimes. Right to protest cannot be justification for terrorism and war against the state.

The government has to be ready to redefine the rules of engagement. When people are demonstrating peacefully, give them water and refreshments; when they are throwing stones and bricks, use rubber bullets or tear gas to disperse them, but when they are setting fire to public properties or attacking house or cars of private citizens, the government has no other choice but to use the full force of law. Good governance does not mean weak governance.

In any civilised country, an act of vandalism or endangering public safety will be dealt with through the harshest application of law. If the thugs on the street open fire on police, police should be given more latitude in defending themselves. As Brad Adams, Asia Director of the Human Rights Watch hinted that police should exercise maximum restraint but may use lethal force "...to protect their lives or those of others. If cool heads don't prevail, Dhaka could dissolve into uncontrolled violence."

Peace is preferable, but sometimes war becomes necessary to secure peace and safety.

The government should put all the options on the table in using the full force of the law. There are politicians who see military as a rival. Military is part of the government and they are committed to safeguard the safety and rights of the people. When it is a matter of protecting the lives and property of the people, no measure is too harsh.

The promise of economic prosperity cannot be frittered away. The peace-loving people in Bangladesh cannot be hostage to the terrorists. Most pundits ignored the fact that as children of the freedom fighters have come of age to reclaim their nationalist spirit; the children of the opponents of Bangladesh's liberation are also out to oppose that.

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The writer is a sociologist and a commentator on current affairs.