

## A barbaric record set

*These criminals must be given exemplary punishment*

WE are aghast at the thought that supporters of a UP election candidate could bring their minds to tossing an infant into a burning earthen oven in a fit of extended anger against campaigners of the opposite camp. Roksana, the badly burned girl, is panting on the borderline of life and death. This set of BNP-backed UP election campaigners were taking their wrath out on the child because her grand father Ashraf Ali being a supporter of the rival Awami League candidate.

The sequence of events reads mind-boggling from the beginning to the end but nothing to match the cruelty meted out to the child as the last act. The story is that a mindless group of campaigners chased some supporters of the AL candidate into the house of Ali, beat them up, manhandled the family members and vandalised the house. At one stage, they snatched the girl from her mother and threw her on to the fire.

The family's agony is far from over. In fact, this has only multiplied thereby typifying the multi-faceted ordeal an aggrieved family has to undergo in the wake of the first blow of vendetta received by it. In the case of Roksana's father, the police would not entertain the complaint unless the name of the BNP candidate's brother was dropped. Then, the gangsters threatened her father to leave the capital with his daughter who was admitted to DMCH for treatment or face dire consequences. The police must provide protection to them.

The criminals are clearly identifiable. They must be brought to book for a number of offences after an effective investigation is made into them.

## JS committees

*No efforts should be spared to include the opposition*

THE government is finally doing something to form the parliamentary standing committees. It has drafted the lists of 41 committees, and is planning to push the scheme through in the forthcoming session of the Jatiya Sangsad.

However, the decision is a unilateral one. Little progress was made after the opposition demanded that it be given such a number of berths as chairmen of committees as will be proportionate to their number of seats in parliament. But the majority of the ruling party lawmakers are convinced that they should not bother about such a demand, as the immediate past government did not respond to a similar request from the then opposition BNP, which had 113 seats in the parliament.

The formation of parliamentary committees has been in abeyance for nearly one year and a quarter of the parliament's tenure and this cannot brook any further delay. The standing committees have a very important role to play in ensuring transparency and accountability of the government through an active role of the opposition in them. These committees are also meant for giving depth and dimension to the functioning of the parliament.

When the previous government decided that even the MPs, who were not ministers, could become chairman of a standing committee, it was actually making a constructive move. But its failure to give opposition lawmakers a single post of chairman reflected a poor understanding of the parliamentary system.

We have come to learn that a section of the ruling party MPs are willing to concede some ground to the opposition by giving them a few posts of chairman. Of course, such concessions have to be made if they want the opposition to play an active role, and they better be made in respect of oversight committees such as public accounts committee, public undertakings committee, et al.

Valuable time has already been lost, and when the parliament okays the committees, leaving the posts of the opposition nominees vacant, it would really give the whole show the look of a 'perfunctory fulfilment of a duty.' The government has not given the opposition space outside the parliament. As for the parliamentary committees they should go the extra-mile to accommodate some of the opposition demands.

Mere formation of the standing committees cannot, of course, be the ultimate goal. The committees will have to have well-defined jobs to perform. But the way things have shaped up so far does little to convince those who need to be that they will be effective. And that is a harsh truth that neither side can ignore, and the ruling party needs to be particularly aware of the pitfall -- an insipid and lackadaisical performance on the part of the committees fully dominated by the ruling party lawmakers cannot provide sinews to democracy.

## At the crossroads



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

THE world is at the crossroads. That it would be so became inevitable after the end of the cold war. Then, one world order ended without ushering in another. The vacuum created was not an international order but the absence of one. Like any other void it had dark foreboding of disaster. If not chronic disorder, intermittent instability loomed large in the post cold war world. Terror attacks in America, followed by Afghan war and now the war clouds over Iraq have brought the possibility closer to reality.

In the war against terrorism America had the rest of the world, including the UN, behind her. America's shock, loss and anger were shared by almost every nation in the world. Her determination to stamp out terrorism, through overt and covert means, was bolstered by bilateral and multilateral support. In spite of George Bush Jr.'s uncouth and crude utterances, America's war against terrorism became a global agenda. Moral and material support for the war came spontaneously and is still continuing. This unprecedented unity across the world received a jolt when the American President all on a sudden spoke of an "axis of evil", mentioning Iraq, Iran and North Korea. There was no link between these countries and the network of terrorists who had been identified as being culpable for September 11. The 'axis of evil speech' was a jarring note in an otherwise harmonious piece presented by the international ensemble.

The rest of the world was rudely

awakened to the fact that in the post-cold war era, America was willing and ready to pursue its own geo-political interests, ignoring the sentiments and reactions of others. The world had already been intimidated by the "with us or against us" rhetoric. The 'axis of evil' speech served notice on countries to take sides. But the problem with the rest of the world, including UN, was that there did not seem to be two sides, no good or evil seen in stark contrast. None of the three countries were involved in the terrorist attack

order in the world. On the contrary, it was a victim of aggression when Iraq invaded, with the rest of the world preferring to remain as silent spectators. In that war America even abetted Iraq with intelligence reports and arms supply. Iran's development of a nuclear power plant is for peaceful purposes and its acquisition of missiles is for defence. A country that has suffered aggression without intervention by any of the big power on its behalf has every right to arm itself against future attacks.

either through arms purchase or local development. In these days of satellite surveillance nothing of significant size moves without notice. If Iraq was engaged in nuclear weapons development, purchases of various equipment and raw materials would have left a trail. In the event, nothing was available to substantiate the American allegation. But this did not deter America from going ahead with war preparation unilaterally. The only ally who joined was the UK. For a while it looked as if the two would

only superpower feels free to undertake war against any country under any pretext, as long as it promotes her interest. America's "Manifest Destiny" has now become a global writ, it would seem.

The world is now witnessing the curious spectacle of the heaviest arms build up in the Middle East since Second World War with the intent to attack Iraq even when UN arms inspectors are carrying out their detailed inspection in every nook and corner of that country.

Saddam nor his generals have blinked. The second interpretation of the arms build up and army mobilisation is that the Americans really mean business and will wage war against Iraq with or without UN approval. In both the interpretations there is a very important common goal: regime change. Disarmament is a pretext, the real purpose is to oust Saddam and install a friendly regime to carry out the victor's bidding.

Regime change by force without UN resolution will strike a death blow to the international order that has prevailed after the Second World War. This 'order' was cold war's single most important positive contribution to world peace and stability. If America, and its only ally-at-arms England, destroy this order now, chaos and instability will follow in its wake. There will be no international law or regulation preventing war and maintaining peace. Only public opinion throughout the world including America and England, can stop the two countries bent on aggression in their tracks. And a rejuvenated UN, as the symbol of world opinion, can bring moderation to bear on impetuous acts of certain members. It is a happy augury that both of these forces are active and playing their part.

Demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of people are taking place across the globe, which cannot be ignored. Nor can the UN as the repository of mankind's trust be sidelined. It helps to strengthen public opinion in favour of peace to have countries like France and Germany differing with America on issues of war and peace. The new world order has to be built on the basis of these forces of sanity. A vigilant world citizenry, a confident UN and an assertive Europe represent the hope for the future. The world may be at the crossroads but it seems to know which road to take.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

**Demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of people are taking place across the globe, which cannot be ignored. Nor can the UN as the repository of mankind's trust be sidelined. It helps to strengthen public opinion in favour of peace to have countries like France and Germany differing with America on issues of war and peace. The new world order has to be built on the basis of these forces of sanity.**

In America nor were any connection found between them and any of the known terrorist organisations. It was utterly baffling as to what America was driving at. Though Iraq had earlier committed aggression against Iran and Kuwait, it was no longer in an aggressive mood. Having been thoroughly defeated in the Gulf war and with oil revenue drastically dwindled under UN sanction, its war machine was hardly any threat. It had expelled the UN arms inspectors more in exasperation with the interminable process of inspection than with any intent to rearm.

No doubt, the repressive regime under Saddam continued but that was a matter for its people to decide. Repressive regimes elsewhere in the past did not become the target of full-scale war with a view to terminating them. Why should Iraq be an exception?

In Iran a theocratic regime might have imposed certain codes of conduct on its people but it too, was an internal matter. Iran has had no record of destabilising peace and

As for North Korea, it has felt insecure ever since the Korean war when the Americans fought on South Korea's side and are still militarily present there. Its development of nuclear weapon should be seen in the backdrop of this stand-off. It showed signs of normalization of relation when the nuclear programme was put on hold after an agreement for aid was reached with America. It is only after America reneged on the agreement that North Korea has threatened to restart the nuclear programme. From none of these three countries there was any immediate provocation made or tangible reason given to justify the epithet 'evil'. The speech was wanton, unexpected and provocative to the extreme.

Even when America tried to make a case against Iraq for its alleged development of weapons of mass destruction it did not wash with many countries, including its close allies in Europe. True, Iraq had thrown out the UN inspectors in 1998 but the intervening years did not see her rearming dangerously

start war against Iraq 'unilaterally', without any UN resolution. But in the face of growing public opinion against war in their own countries and disagreement with allies, they balked.

Then, the UN was pressurized by America to pass a single resolution with built-in provision for military action. This, too, was thwarted, again by unwilling members of the security council. Iraq was given chance to re-open inspection and to declare about disarmament failing which, she was told, a second resolution would be passed for taking military action. This was not what America had wanted but it accepted it, perhaps, to save face. There is another explanation. It might have gone to the UN just for appearances sake and to take a chance if its wish would be fulfilled by the world body. Subsequent approval by the US Senate for war against Iraq, with or without UN resolution, revealed the true intent of America and its attitude to the UN. It has become clear now that in a unipolar world, America as the

They have been given a free run of the country, with no obstacles thrown in their way. Even the humiliation of allowing surprise inspection of presidential palaces has been swallowed by the Iraqis. To allay any suspicion of gagging people they have also agreed their scientists to be interviewed outside Iraq. One wonders what else a country can do to declare its innocence of the guilt as charged by America. Though the inspectors have found no 'smoking gun' Anglo-American forces have practically completed their positioning on land and sea and are having regular practice run for the Iraq war.

There can be two interpretations of this huge mobilisation and aggressive posturing. The first is about a bluff, America, and its only ally UK, are merely trying to strike fear in the hearts and minds of Iraq's generals with the hope that they would topple Saddam to save their own skin. The same strategy may be directed at Saddam to precipitate a voluntary exile. So far the bluff has been called as neither

## Houses of horror



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE house stands under the sun, the refulgence of its whitewash glowing in the sky. The owner of the house is a politician, who once believed that the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie was wrong. He spent half his life defending the underclass. He went to jail, lived in hiding and dared death. He was convinced that private property was evil, which must be abolished.

The house is his private property that stands under the sky like a mausoleum to the ideology, which wanted to destroy it. It looks like the memorial of the man who has lost his ideals, sort of a landmark of his flip-flopped life that went from one extreme to another. The politician who lives in that house is no longer the man he used to be. He has abandoned his belief and burned his passion. The house stands like an urn that holds the ashes of that man, the man whose soul had died in the ambush of his own follies.

In *Table Talk*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes that a palace is more than a house, but it must be a house at least. The palatial house of the politician looks like a vault that guards a secret, the sombre

silence of a depleted soul resounding in its splendour. It looks like the edifice of a conflict, which has been resolved in favour of the material by undermining the ideal. The house seems haunted by the ghost, its columns and cornices imprecating horror.

Karl Marx believed that consciousness did not determine life, instead life determined consciousness. The man, who started his life with a consciousness, eventually

exasperated his means as luxury turned into necessity, and each acquisition honed his appetite to go on acquiring further.

The house stands like an epithet of greed, that fire in the hearts of men which devours conscience with flames of unrelenting needs. But it also stands like an arithmetic riddle that befuddles logic. Where did the left-leaning politician find the money to build it? He spent his life in the underground, never held

anew the model or resist the desire to build at all.

How did the politician make his decision to build that house? Did he weigh its cost against his ability? When he saw the figure of the house, did he try to rate the cost of its erection? Did he realize that cost outweighed his ability, and that people could question where he had found the money?

The house stands there like an unabashed response to these

once hated it, turned that theft into an art and built a palatial house. He succumbed to the temptations and committed crime. He may not have killed, he may not have raped but he has stolen for sure.

Thus the house that shines like a pearl in the sunlight holds darkness in its bosom. And what lie buried in that darkness are the impulses of men, which lose control. Roman Emperor Nero built a new palace and standing before its

and cornices imprecating the horror of that deplorable mess.

If you look at that house for long, it makes you feel dizzy as if a dump of toxic waste radiates discomfort and contaminates the soul. It reminds you of the proclamation by the American writer Polly Adler, "A house is not a home." Has the house the politician built ever been a home to his children? Have they grown up sane and sound in that outrageously conspicuous house where their father has disgraced himself?

The glow of the house perhaps is nothing but the iridescent light of that dilemma faced by those children. They must have been sent abroad and given good education. How do they reconcile the cost of that house with the ability of their father? Or do they try to do that reconciliation at all?

It is a bad news either way. If those children are doing that reconciliation, it must be painful for them to realise that their father is a dishonest man. If they are not doing that reconciliation, it shows that they are indifferent, which means they are not going to hesitate to adopt unfair means, given that choice.

The house stands under the sun like a museum of modern inheritance. Children should ask their fathers to take them there on a weekend and sort out whether they want a house like that. Then they should prepare to learn either to tackle it when they realise that their fathers are dishonest men, or to remain indifferent.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

**CROSS TALK**

**If you look at that house for long, it makes you feel dizzy as if a dump of toxic waste radiates discomfort and contaminates the soul. It reminds you of the proclamation by the American writer Polly Adler, "A house is not a home." Has the house the politician built ever been a home to his children? Have they grown up sane and sound in that outrageously conspicuous house where their father has disgraced himself?**

turned it around. He built the house because the material displaced the ideal and life encroached upon consciousness in a bizarre dialectic. The walls of the house, the lustre of its white paint, its stately appearance, everything ensemble embodies the grisly countenance of a terrible decadence.

English poet James Fenton lamented that what mattered is not what was built but what was knocked down. The house of the politician makes one think of that contradiction. How many houses did he raze to the ground before he erected that magnificent one? From each according to his means to each according to his need was his motto once. But his own need

a job or owned a business and is not known to have had a fabulous inheritance.

The house thus stands like a monument of shame, which tells brick by brick, the story of a man who has indulged in perfidy. His family lives in it, wife, children, parents and relatives; people who embellish his life walked inside that abode of mischief. In Henry IV, part 2, Shakespeare tells us how the decision to build a house is made. "When we mean to build", he writes, we first survey the plot, then draw the model. When we see the figure of the house, we must rate the cost of erection. What is the next step after that? If the cost outweighs ability, we must draw

questions. The politician selected the best paint as if to brush off the stains on his character under its milk white coating. He must have believed that the ostentation of his house could gloss over the calamities associated with its construction. He believed that he could dazzle the eyes of people and then throw them into a moral black out.

A French reformer named Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had observed that property was theft. English essayist G.K. Chesterton expressed the same thing in a different way. He wrote that thieves respect property and merely wish the property to become their property so that they might more perfectly respect it. The politician, who

gilded columns said that at last he was going to live like a human being. Imelda Marcos needed three thousand pairs of shoes, and Egypt's king Faruk ate oysters like nobody could count. Another Roman Emperor Elagabalus had ordered his soldiers to fetch tons of cobwebs from Rome. When the soldiers returned, he boasted that indeed very big was Rome!

That is perhaps the idea of the grandiose. In his early life, the politician was grandiose with ideal, and later he turned grandiose with material, shifting the centre of his life from excess of equality to equality of excess. The house conjures that transformation in its magnificent image, its columns

## OPINION

# If our doctors were a little more caring...

NAZMA KABIR

EVEN five years ago I did not think that I would go abroad for medical treatment. But in the end I could not hold onto my resolution.

On May 20, 1999 I had the privilege to participate in a round table meeting on "Why our patients go abroad for treatment and how to reduce this tendency?" -- organized by the *Bhorer Kagaj* and Public Health Association of Bangladesh -- Forum of Health Care of Financing. In this round table, around 30 renowned speakers expressed their opinions regarding the issue and recommended a number of suggestions for the government, non-government organizations and general practitioners as well as for other public health specialists to overcome the challenge. In that occasion, I was very bold to mention, "I wouldn't go abroad for my treatment if only our doctors show some sincerity, treat the patients with certain dignity and care." The

participants of the round table meeting also highlighted the issues of quality and availability of medicines and the reliability of the pathological reports. Doctors also need to be accountable for the treatment they provide and this is seriously lacking in our country, where doctors are not punished for malpractice. If doctors in our country were held accountable for malpractice, if any then maybe they would take more caution and care in their treatments.

Around mid-November 2002, I began experiencing "double vision". As someone who has not yet had the need for glasses except reading glasses, my first conclusion was that I needed to get my vision checked. So I went to our family ophthalmologist, whom my husband and two daughters have regularly seen for the past nine years. Upon examination, he did not find anything wrong with my vision and could not explain the cause of my double vision, and hence referred me to a neurologist.

The neurologist made me take several tests, such as routine blood, urine tests, X-rays of skull, sinuses etc. Based on the test reports he treated me for sinuses, but the double vision still remained.

While I was with the specialist and waiting for my turn to be examined, I had some observation regarding the patient-doctor relationship. The doctor hardly touched the patients or even had an eye-to-eye communication with them. As soon as the patient approached him, he immediately started to prescribe 7-8 medicines (God only knows how many of them were really necessary) and checked for several pathological tests in a sheet/form, while the patient, depending on the level of education or socio-economic ability, tried somehow to describe his or her health problem. The doctor, aware of the long queue of patients, hurried the examination process without any introduction or explanation of my treatment he was prescribing. The lack of communication was very painful. I also observed that even

though the doctor was examining/touching some patients, he did not bother to wash his hands in the wash basin which was just half a meter away behind him. The behaviour and attitude of these professors/doctors were totally unacceptable!

Initially, I was impressed with the waiting room, with the seating arrangement, TV and even a junior doctor taking histories of the patients before arrival of the professor or the specialist, in one of the diagnostic centres in Dhaka. The following day, my doctor also consulted another specialist regarding my problem. Even though I felt that the doctor did indeed give me time, and I did feel fortunate, however the doctors did not make an effort to discuss my condition with me. They were discussing my condition in front of me, without including me in the conversation, or acting like I was not there. It was hard not to lose my confidence in them after that. To me, it appeared that both the doctors were taking a shot in the

dark. I lost my enthusiasm and faith in their consultation and advice.

Until this moment, I was determined to continue my treatment in Bangladesh. But I was disappointed in the poor patient-doctor relationship, and the attitude/behaviour of the doctors in general.

I talked to several of my colleagues regarding my condition for their suggestions; most of them had skeptical comments about the doctors in our country. Even a colleague of mine, also a doctor, advised me not to go to a well known, reputed doctor, saying that he would not even give me "six seconds of his time". If that is the reputation of even the best of our doctors, then is it a wonder that so many of us are losing faith in them and turning to other countries for our medical needs?

In the meantime, several family members and friends, who had all shared their negative experiences with local medical facilities and doctors, encouraged me to go

abroad for a medical check-up. Initially I was hesitant in going abroad for treatment, but after my experience and the continued persuasion by others, I finally decided to go to Bangkok.

My first impression of Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand, was that of a trust of the doctors, which I had not felt in Dhaka. I began thinking about why I felt this way. It was not hard to attribute my sense of trust and satisfaction to the clean and hygienic facilities and environment of the hospital, but most importantly, the behaviour of the doctors. From the very first day that I was there, the doctors and nurses treated me with much care and consideration. Not only did they perform a thorough medical check-up with comprehensive tests and treatment, but they also explained each procedure to me every step of the way and were extremely attentive listeners. It was unbelievably comforting to be listened to for more than 'six seconds' and have

doctors regularly consulting with me, and actually treating me like a patient with genuine need and concern.

During my 10-day stay at the Bumrungrad hospital, I met several Bangladeshi patients who had come to Bangkok because they felt they could not trust the doctors at home or they had suffered from wrong treatment in Dhaka. One female patient who was in the same room with me, suffered from simple urine infection. This was simply embarrassing as the doctors in BG Hospital wondered if in Bangladesh simple urine infection could not be detected! I felt sorry just thinking about these middle class families spending their money for a good treatment! We are spending thousands of dollars abroad just for simple treatment and good behaviour from doctors!

I have returned home with the same problem of double vision as when I left for Bangkok, and the only apparent solution is lots of time and rest. In the end, many of the treat-

ments prescribed by the Bumrungrad doctors were the same as the advice of my Dhaka doctors, but just the manner in which the treatments were provided was enough to secure my trust in the former. I wish I had had the confidence in our own doctors so that I would not have had to make the journey to Bangkok for this treatment.

I would like to reiterate that it is not that I think that our doctors lack in ability or qualifications. It is rather that I think there needs to be an improvement in the patient-doctor relationship, as well as the communication skills of doctors in our country. Doctors need to think of their patients as fellow humans and compatriots who deserve their attention and sincerity.

Nazma Kabir, PhD is a resident of Gulshan.