

Murder in Jhenidah

Quick trial and conviction must be ensured

HERE might be two reasons for the gruesome murder of five innocent people in broad daylight allegedly by members of an outlawed party in Jhenidah. One -- as the police are saying, could be the outcome of Union Parishad election-related rivalry; and secondly, old grudges erupting in the power struggle between feuding groups of an outlawed party. Two of the dead were known to have been active members of extremist groups in the past.

Whatever the reasons, we are appalled by the fact that five innocent lives have been lost, some of them only bread-earners in their families. We can only point out the law enforcing agencies' failure to take precautionary measures in an area where extremist groups have been active, especially at a time of high tension associated with the UP elections. Rectification is upto them.

Even if the two of the dead had some animosity with their old colleagues, the good thing was that they had returned to normal life and were simply campaigning for their favourite candidate. For that matter, the other three were also gunned down ruthlessly for no fault of theirs. What wrong did they do to deserve such a cruel end to their lives? Reports say that one of the dead was day labourer Nurul Islam. His wife and seven children would now be thrown on to the street. Family members of other victims are bracing for a similar fate.

This sort of violence can't be allowed to go on. We demand that the killers be caught soon and punished. Many innocent people have lost their lives to such vicious homicidal-maniacs; but very few, if any, ever see justice done. We hope the authorities would take the latest incident more seriously and ensure an expeditious trial and conviction for those responsible for the mind-boggling murder.

Release the NGO funds

Let the poor not suffer anymore

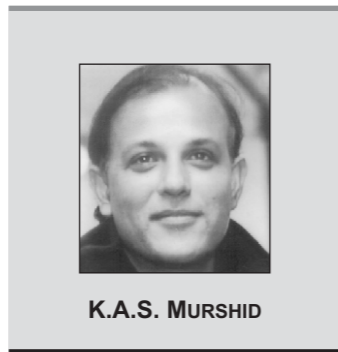
THE government certainly reserves the right to monitor activities of non-government organisations (NGOs) to satisfy itself with the accountability standards being followed by them. After all, millions of donor dollars are channelled through them every year to a country and its government needs to know where and how such allocations got spent.

However, such an accountability mechanism has to be institutionalised and devoid of political overtone, slant or interference of any kind. Importantly, the government should itself be objective, accountable and transparent while trying to introduce accountability in the NGO affairs by way of keeping above political connotation of all sorts. This is what unfortunately appears missing in its decision to hold back funds in excess of Tk 350 crore from five NGOs on the grounds of 'utilisation irregularities'. The NGO Affairs Bureau says that an investigation into the suspected irregularities is yet to be complete but it does not "have any political motive behind holding back their (NGOs) funds". The slow pace of its investigations -- already some 15 months have gone by -- raises a question-mark or two. Why mark out certain NGOs for the treatment? The worried donors have twice been told in this regard that the government would act when the probe is over. When that happens remains, at this point in time, anybody's guess.

The fund blockage has in the meanwhile severely affected different projects of the select group of NGOs, forcing them to squeeze their programmes on literacy, poverty alleviation, women empowerment and social capital development through technical support to small organisations. The government must realise that the NGOs present the brighter face of the country abroad and have achieved phenomenal success in encouraging grassroots participation for an all-round development of the country. The fallout could be a loss of face in the international community and, worryingly still, the donors might think of redirecting resource to other least and underdeveloped countries.

Basically, the government risks loss of credibility in the donor community and could be seen as viewing the issue not from a developmental angle but with a politically jaundiced eye. The biggest loser in the deadlock are the poor and the marginalised sections of society for whose emancipation and empowerment the NGO programmes are directed at. Therefore, instead of impeding their activities on alleged grounds of irregularities, the government should release the funds and monitor their utilisation by the NGOs. Should it get any tangible evidence of any wrongful use of funds the government, of course, reserves the right to take action against it, as always. However, there is no point making them virtually dysfunctional on the basis of an assumption or anticipation of foul-play.

Of Eid and chopped liver



K.A.S. MURSHID

I guess Eid could be fun, especially if you enjoy consuming large quantities of meat. I for one am glad that it is all over. Allow me to explain: first of all, there is the public health and aesthetic aspects of Eid that sit uncomfortably with the subtle, spiritual and even sublime symbolism associated with animal sacrifice. I doubt if there is any religious requirement for us to flaunt animal slaughter publicly, in the full gaze of children and the faint-hearted (like myself). I doubt if *sacrifice* is the appropriate word to describe the mood of those who are able to afford a suitable animal for the occasion. In other words, I am still looking for a solution that will (a) meet our religious requirements fully, but (b) at the same time protect us (and our sensibilities) from the sight of slaughter and the smell of blood.

Then there are the usual news headlines that greet us every Eid. I of course refer to newspaper headlines like "Overloaded Launch Sinks -- 100 Missing" or "Bus Skids into Ditch" and so on, with appropriate

pictures of wailing relatives and wide-eyed survivors. This year however, these stories failed to surface. Could it be that our highways and waterways have actually become safer, saner? In fact the papers did report a boat capsized over the holidays -- but this was a genuine mishap, a case of bad luck rather than faulty safety standards and a derelict public transport system. Nevertheless, when one considers the hassle (and the danger) that people routinely have to endure to get back

are spent unofficially during these holidays so that the entire week is literally wasted. Things are only slowly beginning to return to their normal, chaotic routine, even as I write my piece on Monday evening. The streets are still (blissfully) uncluttered and everything appears strangely quiet. In other words, the country essentially grinds to a halt as hordes of humanity move back and forth across the plains of Bangladesh.

On the positive side, the exodus

all those guys to stay on in their nice, lovely villages for a little longer, and perhaps come into town once or twice a year (to draw their salaries, for instance). I have a feeling that productivity wouldn't really suffer and it might even help to impart some dynamism into the rural economy.

Chopped liver

No, it isn't quite my favourite food -- not even during *Qurbani*. I understand nevertheless, that it is a

women who have taken to B-D, hook, line and sinker -- even old men (but not old women, it would seem) have fallen prey to its dubious allure. I have vivid recollections of watching various grand old men (poets, writers, journalists and so on) discussing 'bhalobasha' or even their various 'bhalobashas' eloquently on the small screen, suitably attired in red shirts and holding on to bouquets of red roses.

The question is why has B-D captured the imagination of the Bengali

likely to be related to the following: (a) timing -- the fact that the day virtually coincides with the onset of the Bengali spring must have something to do with its tremendous appeal; (b) timing again -- the month of February, in Bangladesh is very special -- this is a time of heightened sensitivities and peaking emotions; and (c) temperament -- come to think of it, it is difficult to imagine that we survived all these years without a B-D -- quite unthinkable, really.

B-D, however, is not EXACTLY equivalent to V-Day. This is perhaps best explained by a poem forwarded to me by a would-be poet (Mr. Dewan Gazi -- not, of course, his real name):

A black rose for a Valentine

- by D. Gazi

Last night a bright little star crashed into my garden.

The flowers were not impressed, except for the Red Rose

Which donned a black veil over its lovely face.

And thus the Black Rose was born -- Of vanity and grief.

I wish I had one to give you on this Valentine's Day (instead of chopped liver).

Bon appetit.

I wonder if you have noticed the 'Bengali' traits in this poem that makes it essentially a B-D poem rather than a V-Day poem? If not, don't worry.

Trust both Eid and Valentine's Day were fun. Perhaps next year you too will be inspired to write a poem or two?

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BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

Chopped liver : No, it isn't quite my favourite food -- not even during Qurbani. I understand nevertheless, that it is a potent symbol of the 'heart' (yes, that's right of the sort that one associates with Saint Valentine's Day) -- even if used somewhat caustically by e.g. an irate lover or in earnest, by a rustic peasant. I guess there wasn't any shortage of chopped liver during V-Day, 2003, thanks to Eid... Actually, I have been somewhat taken aback by the sudden surge in popularity of V-Day in Bangladesh (where it has been christened as Bhalobasha Dibash). ..The question is why has B-D captured the imagination of the Bengali bhadrolok so completely, so rapidly?

to their village homes in time for Eid, one wonders whether it's really been worth the effort, expense and danger.

There is also the matter of 'costs' (it would be dereliction of duty on my part if I didn't discuss costs!). And I am not referring to the costs incurred in travelling back and forth or even the cost of buying the chosen animal. I refer mainly to the unofficial holidays that are invariably added on to the usual three-day holiday granted by the State. I reckon that at least two or three extra days

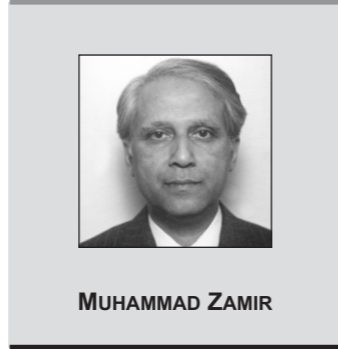
definitely has a beneficial impact on the urban environment: less garbage, a whole week devoid of traffic jams and motor exhaust, and above all, a greatly reduced noise level. On second thought, my comment on garbage stands withdrawn as I begin to recollect our experience with piled up garbage and animal waste on every street corner awaiting the return of the garbage disposal teams from their rural sojourns. Garbage or no, those few days over the Eid holidays were perfect bliss. Only if we could persuade

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Actually, I have been somewhat taken aback by the sudden surge in popularity of V-Day in Bangladesh (where it has been christened as *Bhalobasha Dibash*). It's not just teenagers and young men and

bhadrolok so completely, so rapidly? I mean, Valentine's Day has been around for quite a while, with its commercial observance largely restricted to the US but later successfully exported to Europe along with Coke, hamburgers and Hollywood movies. While Coca Cola and hamburgers have been no strangers in our own shores, St. Valentine took his sweet time to get here, and when he finally did, the welcome that he's received has been simply astounding. The successful transplantation of V-Day to Bengal is

Globalisation: The idea and the reality



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

SOMEONE asked me the other day to give an example of globalisation. I could reply without difficulty as I was watching a cricket match on television. It was between India and New Zealand. In between a drubbing, the tele-audience was being informed of the support for the Indian team by Pepsi Cola and Samsung. Here was globalisation at work. For the purpose of commerce, two companies, from two countries, were associating themselves with a sport that it rarely played either in the United States or in the Far East.

The origin of this buzz word may be recent, but the idea of a global invisible hand controlling the market and also being guided by existing market forces is definitely not new. One really cannot call it a twentieth century invention. The chartering of the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1628 (to colonize the New World) and the formation of the British East India Company sometime later were really evoked out of the desire for big business not only to dominate countries far away but also to open up new assured markets. Trading companies with a will of their own were expected to be profitable and also satisfy the urge of political expansion.

This concept juxtaposed with the idea of nation states created its own dynamics as colonial interests dictated their own rules. Wars over turf ran its own course in the sphere of international political and economic relations.

It appears to have taken World War II, however, to have notched up in the human consciousness the emergence of global dimensions in the area of trade. The economists thought it was possible but the politicians still felt weighed down by the prevailing conditions generated by

the Cold War. The idea remained there in the background but without clear expression. In fact the other day I looked up the 1971 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and could not find any item on the world 'globalisation'.

The word and the philosophy behind it appears to have gained ground and access in the euphoria after communism's demise. The falling of the Berlin Wall in November,

could be sold everywhere'. It was also underlined that failure to go global was a disadvantage that needed to be overcome.

However, as we all know, it was not a straight story. The Mexican Peso crisis of December 1994 was followed by the 'Asian flu' throughout 1997-98.

All of a sudden the script changed and scepticism crept in. Caution

paradise of globalisation. Points were raised that everyone might not be playing on a level field.

Imperceptibly, things appear to have started to change. Whereas, 'it was almost an unwritten rule of international law that no conference could be held without a marquee reference to the word global', now-a-days critical review has set in to evaluate and determine its effectiveness. The inevitability espoused by

Southern front to fight imperialist globalisation'. Political perspectives of all social movements were underlined. It is understood that Professor Bellow of the Philippines, one of the organisers, went to the extent of suggesting that 'the current global capitalist paradigm was in crisis and that it was time to embrace a new vision'. Emotional participants expressed the view that the IMF and the World Bank lacked 'a heart' and 'a soul'.

POST BREAKFAST

In order to be more effective, the concept of globalisation and its overseeing agencies have to identify the needs of developing and least developed countries and try to strengthen the support mechanism. The problems of poor backward and forward linkage facilities, relatively insufficient credit extension structures and factors like 'limited access to navigable water, long distances to major markets.... unequal income structures inherited from colonial regimes', which restrict countries from benefiting from global opportunities, need to be addressed.

1989 appears to have generated the signal that free markets had emerged as victorious and consequently it was in good order for corporations and governments to 'go global'. It was considered sound for governments to tea down trade walls and promote big business.

The mantra of cheap labour, billions of new customers and the arrival of the internet created the heady mix which turbocharged the trading world. Optimism led 'big thinkers' like US President Clinton to preach the principle of cheap new supply and rich new demand. Economists egged on by the expansion of e-mail and dot-com technology changed gears and moved to the faster lane.

The European Union as a free trade area was followed by the creation of NAFTA in December, 1992 (consisting of Mexico, Canada and the USA). Multinational corporations grew from around 7000 in the world in 1975 to about 60,000 by 2000.

As the frenzy intensified, it became considerably easy to raise money for cross-border merger deals and implement the idea of going global. For different people it meant not only economic integration but also new wealth. Multinationals felt that 'the same products

stepped into the arena of major international flows of capital that had been in motion in different stock markets for the last few years. Businesses now started to invest only a small percentage of what they were once willing to undertake into new ventures abroad. Investors felt that they had burnt their hopes in the emerging markets of Asia and Russia. In fact, many also decided to look at other alternatives in addition to Wall Street.

Riots during the World Trade Summit in Seattle in December, 1999, pointed out that cracks had crept in. Signs on the street indicated that globalisation was not the ultimate solution that it was being touted up to be. This disquiet was reflected very soon afterwards in economic terms. Foreign stock purchases came down drastically from about US\$ 50 billion in 2000 to about US \$18 billion. Value of cross border mergers significantly came down from about US \$1.3 trillion in 2000 to about US \$620 billion in 2001. Foreign Direct Investment in terms of inflows also came down by nearly US \$530 billion between 2000 and 2001. Import volumes in global terms also shrunk. All these pointed not only to areas of uncertainty but also the possibility that something might be wrong in this

Thomas Friedman in his "The Lotus and the Olive Tree" and Samuel Huntington's "Davos Culture" is being debated. Ordinary people are measuring up their daily lives against the expected wonders supposed to accrue from globalisation, and are sometimes finding themselves short-changed.

This frustration in recent years has been reflected in the fiery (sometimes literally) protests and riots by environmentalists, unionists, anarchists and others. Interpreted tangentially, globalisation in the protesters' world view is being seen as synonymous with American profit and domination.

The bursting of the dot-com bubble since March 2000 and its consequence on globalisation hype has also led some to predicate that the end of super G is also round the corner. The terrorist attack of 11 September, 2001 and its implications for global interaction have also led some academicians to postulate that "the illusion" of global capitalism is about to pass.

In fact, in the beginning of this month, the Asian process of the World Social Forum met in Hyderabad, India in a meeting of the Asian Social Forum and various speakers stressed that the need of the hour was to 'build up a united

The need of the hour according to them was not reform in these institutions, but doing away with them.

Protests undertaken most recently in Europe have also proposed deglobalisation and the creation of a scenario where national and local institutions will be able to operate with greater power within a global system characterized by plural global governance. It has been indicated that this is the only way to bring about resurgence in the world economy.

It would appear from the growing discourse on globalisation that there are soft areas within this philosophy that requires a more flexible regulated process. There is need to differentiate the implementing ability among countries occupying separate levels of development. If globalisation is to succeed, mere words will not do. Ideas will have to be translated into practice. The needs of a developing country without a proper infrastructure have to be dovetailed into the inter-linkages to make the flow of goods and services easier and not one-sided.

In order to be more effective, the concept of globalisation and its overseeing agencies have to identify the needs of developing and least developed countries and try to strengthen the support mecha-

nism. The problems of poor backward and forward linkage facilities, relatively insufficient credit extension structures and factors like 'limited access to navigable water, long distances to major markets.... unequal income structures inherited from colonial regimes', which restrict countries from benefiting from global opportunities, need to be addressed.

Agencies interested in global peace and prosperity have to understand why a country like Bangladesh, despite being offered duty-free and quota-free access for this goods into Europe, are having difficulty in meeting their export potential. They will then realise that it is not because the Bangladeshi exporters do not want to meet the strict phyto-sanitary conditions but because the phyto-sanitary industry and expertise is not sufficiently in place. It will also be noticed that export of agricultural produce from developing countries face difficulty because of agricultural subsidy in the developed world and pharmaceutical industries are also unable to enter the lucrative Western market because of regulatory mechanisms and extended intellectual property rights processes.

Overcoming objections and meeting standards of developed countries (which sometimes appear to be more subjective and protectionist than objective) takes unnecessary time. This leads to frustration. Instead of a growing economy with greater job opportunities, some countries find themselves chained to the bottom of the international pile. Their living standards remain stagnant and poverty reduction becomes another empty phrase. As is natural, such conditions brew their own poison.

In this contemporary scenario, time has come for us to actively consider sitting down again and identifying the shortcomings of the existing situation related to globalisation. We have to find acceptable remedies -- not one based on the principle that a nation should without question open its doors only to trade but find itself selectively debarred from the principle of freedom of movement.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

Powell's Speech: Rusty at best

BILLY I AHMED

IN a live television address that attracted audience worldwide, Mr Powell said his information was irrefutable and undeniable evidence that Saddam Hussein was concealing weapons of mass destruction. It was something like a tension with smothered chuckling breaking out at the most inappropriate of moments. So it was in the public gallery of the United Nations Security Council on Wednesday 05 February 2003.

"Hello! Hello! Hello! Go ahead..." So began a radio conversation between two Iraqi army officers intercepted by foreign intelligence agencies and played on by US Secretary of State Colin Powell to the Council. But, unfortunate for Mr Powell that the impressive show or should one say stunts of photos,

graphics, and satellite images lacked enough gun powder to ignite what was wanted the most: a collective gasp of surprise or of shock. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, quite frankly, looked a trifle bored. Perhaps Mr Powell foresaw difficulty in keeping the attention of his audience. His projections were impressive, but his interpretation remained unconvincing.

"That bunker," he pointed out, would be teeming with Iraqis and weapons of mass destruction. But how does he know? The only moving image he had was of an Iraqi jet apparently spraying chemical or biological agent. But the clip, as he admitted, was ages old. Did he really need to use the projection screen to display, word for word, a key paragraph of the resolution passed by the council in Novem-

ber? He was not speaking to underlings at the State Department but to fellow foreign ministers. They know full well what the resolution states. "The pronounce-

ment members of the Council that, along with the United States and Britain, hold veto power. "The information provided today by the US secretary of state once

of to what extent is Iraq complying with the demands of the Security Council. "German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, a skeptic on any military action against Iraq, said evi-

including allowing over flights from U-2 spy planes, as the United States is seeking.

Simon Crea the Federal Opposition Leader said United States Secretary of State Colin Powell had not made a case that would justify an attack on Iraq without a new United Nations resolution.

So, hello Mr Powell, the approach of US and your strongest ally the UK -- beating the drums of war -- seems to have mellowed, as your 85 minutes or so upright speech failed to open the Pandora's Box to convince all that war is the only recluse to disarm Saddam. The speech was rusty, the world already knows. Lately it appears that Mr Powell is a moulting dove and joining the bandwagon of hawks.

Mr Powell's remarks did not seem to sway the three other permanent members of the Council that, along with the United States and Britain, hold veto power...The approach of US and its strongest ally the UK -- beating the drums of war -- seems to have mellowed, as Mr Powell's 85 minutes or so upright speech failed to open the Pandora's Box to convince all that war is the only recluse to disarm Saddam. The speech was rusty, the world already knows. Lately it appears that Mr Powell is a moulting dove and joining the bandwagon of hawks.

ments that Mr Powell made in his presentation are utterly unrelated to the truth," countered Mohammed Al-Douri. "There are incorrect allegations, unnamed sources unknown sources." He also suggested that audio tapes played to

have voiced support for forcibly disarming Hussein, but the Bush administration is counting on Spain and Bulgaria, among others, to be part of any coalition against Iraq.

Mr Powell's remarks did not seem to sway the three other permanent members of the Council that, along with the United States and Britain, hold veto power. "The information provided today by the US secretary of state once

convincingly indicates the fact that the activities of the international inspectors in Iraq must be continued," Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said. "They alone can provide an answer to the question

dence presented by Powell and findings of the weapons inspectors "have to be examined carefully." Germany currently holds the rotating Security Council chairmanship. "We must continue to seek a peaceful solution to the crisis," he

including allowing over flights from U-2 spy planes, as the United States is seeking. Simon Crea the Federal Opposition Leader said United States Secretary of State Colin Powell had not made a case that would justify an attack on Iraq without a new United Nations resolution. So, hello Mr Powell, the approach of US and your strongest ally the UK -- beating the drums of war -- seems to have mellowed, as your 85 minutes or so upright speech failed to open the Pandora's Box to convince all that war is the only recluse to disarm Saddam. The speech was rusty, the world already knows. Lately it appears that Mr Powell is a moulting dove and joining the bandwagon of hawks.

Billy Ahmed is a researcher.