

Hasina's remarks

Dangerous, better not uttered

WE are worried at the utterances of the leader of the opposition, following the death of a party man and the police action on the 14-Party Alliance, that each death will see another day of hartal.

These remarks of hers were preceded not long ago by calls to seek reprisals for the repression on her party men by the police during the various siege programmes of the alliance. Coming from the leader of the opposition it is shocking. These, unfortunately, display a retributory attitude, hardly the reflection of political sagacity that one expects from our political leaders at this juncture.

Such attitude should better be abandoned, because, given the atmosphere that has been already vitiated by the immature and ham-handed policies of the administration and the violent attitude of the police, it might lead us further to an irreversible collision course, from which the parties might find it difficult to salvage the situation.

As it is, a very combustible scenario faces the country. It appears that the government has pitted the police and the people against one another in an adversarial role, something that cannot bode well for the future of the country. We may not be wrong in apprehending that the statements such as we hear made by the leader of the opposition will further engender open confrontation and antagonism between the opposition activists and the law enforcing agencies, adding to the already turbulent situation and deepening the crisis even more. Furthermore, one feels such a diatribe would only help in weaning the common man from the opposition's cause rather than endearing her to it.

We are dismayed even more when we find that the common position taken by the ruling alliance leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and the opposition leader Abdul Hamid against hartal on the floor of the parliament is not being reflected in their actions on ground.

If Mannan Bhuiyan calls for the opposition to shun the path of strike and violence and sit for a dialogue instead to resolve the issues, the government can do no worse than to continue with the police brutality and violence against the opposition party members. By the same token, when one hears call for reprisals the only impression one gets is that the opposition's words hardly meet its deeds.

Playing around with dead body

What a despicable act!

IT is mind-boggling, abominable and unheard of. The very death of Golam Mostafa Milon, an Awami League volunteer group leader from tear gas shell attack topped off by merciless police beating during Sunday's opposition siege programme was a reprehensible act by itself. But the matter didn't end there, there was an even more contemptuous follow through as the police held his dead body in custody at the DMCH mortuary and despatched it at midnight to the Pirojpur village home of the deceased for burial the next morning.

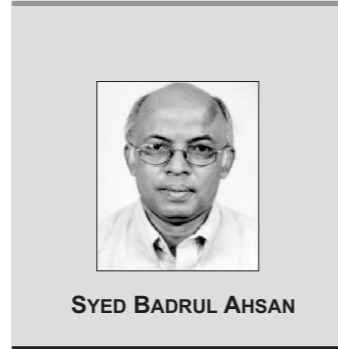
His wife, children and other close relatives couldn't even take a proper last glimpse of him, to say nothing of their denial of attendance at his funeral rather secretly and hurriedly conducted away in Pirojpur -- all under police surveillance.

Even an alien police force wouldn't have done it, although the cops were acting under orders from the top. The dead body is a hallowed possession of the deceased person's near and dear ones and their being denied of the last rites is not only antithetical to time-honoured religious values but also repugnant to humanitarian sensibilities.

After someone dies in the line of political agitation, nobody should try and make political capital out of his sacrosanct last remains. The cat and mouse game played with Milon's dead body by the authorities driven by a political motive was truly an abominable instance where all sense of propriety is thrown to the winds.

May Golam Mostafa Milon's soul rest in peace. Our heartfelt condolences to the members of the bereaved family and we wish they would have the fortitude to bear up with his loss.

Coups, killings and the militarisation of politics



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

GROUND REALITIES

The spells of military and quasi-military rule we in Bangladesh have passed through have done far graver damage to politics than the incompetence or crass opportunism of our political classes. The militarisation of politics, spawning as it has political organisations with roots in undemocratic soil and such monstrosities as the once well-promoted (again in the Ershad years) Freedom Party, has left liberal democracy badly wounded in Bangladesh.

GENERAL Hussein Muhammad Ershad told a questioner on television last week that he had not seized power in 1982. He had only been invited to take charge of the country by President Abdus Sattar. And he had obliged the old man. You might now be quite tempted to acknowledge the gracious nature of the man that is Ershad.

Judging by his reflections on what happened, or did not happen, in March 1982, it would appear that the country was in a condition grave enough to warrant the intervention of the army and its chief of staff. We do not have to fall for that argument, to buy it as it were. And where it is a question of Ershad coming forth with his views of the world as it used to be in our lives all those years ago, we will comfort ourselves through recalling all the old tales of military intervention in Bangladesh and, prior to that, in Pakistan.

Ershad is surely not the first military ruler to enlighten us on the necessity of military intervention in politics. Neither does he happen to be the first among all the soldiers who have commandeered politics to try to give us an explanation for behaviour that is certainly not tenable.

The fact remains, all these years after March 1982, that the overthrow of the Sattar administration was an

act of manifestly sinister intent, seeing that it was a clear violation of the constitution and the rules of civilised behaviour. Of course, there is little question that Justice Sattar, only months into his term as Bangladesh's elected president, found himself in an embattled state, again owing to causes springing from within his ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

The President at that point of time had clearly drawn the conclusion that drastic action against elements in the government was necessary in order for the country to have democracy set on a firm, clear new path. There was little reason, therefore, for General Ershad to strike out at the government, one he was constitutionally pledge-bound to defend as a servant of the republic. But when he did decide to put the elected government out to pasture, it was one more instance of how democracy had all too often been undermined by ambitious men in the military in these parts.

The casualty, as always, was politics. Worse, every instance of military intervention has been followed by a systematic campaign aimed at a denigration of politicians and political parties, a process that began with General Ayub Khan's seizing control of Pakistan in October 1958.

But, then again, the entire course of the movement for Bengali regional autonomy followed by the armed struggle for independence was supposed to have signified a move away from the Pakistani legacy of military-bureaucratic dominance of the state.

It turns out that the People's Republic of Bangladesh has, in more ways than one, mutated into a political entity through the legacy of military rule in Pakistan coming to be a defining feature of politics within Bangladesh's geographical and political territory between mid 1975 and late 1990. It was that single phase in national history which left democratic politics crippled in the country. The nation continues to reel from the consequences of the various bouts of military rule imposed on it by our own Bengalis.

One certainly does not need, after all these years, to travel back to the past. And yet the legacy of the past calls for good, deft handling on our part. The rather disturbing reality in our lives is that the past has not quite been handled the way we would have liked it to be handled. General Ershad's act of removing an elected government by force of arms should have been dealt with, once democratic politics reasserted itself in early 1991, by a judicial process. That was not done.

The legal complexities in which Ershad found himself after his fall justifiably related to the charges of corruption building up around him; and yet the far more serious charge of undermining the state and subverting the constitution through his coup d'etat of March 1982 has never been focused on. The man remains a player on the political scene, to our collective regret.

But just as you comprehend the need for a necessary settlement of old scores, where the matter of a violation of the constitutional process is concerned, you remember too all the other patently illegal acts that have remained outside judicial inquiry. The coup that led to the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the violent overthrow of his government was not only not condemned but was also, morally inexplicably, justified through the Fifth Amendment to the constitution.

In similar fashion, the dissolution of a judicial committee set up to inquire into the murders of the four national leaders -- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansoor Ali, and AHM Quamruzzaman -- in early November 1975 was never questioned despite the restoration of parliamentary government in the early 1990s. The difficulty with a propensity to look away from sordid political realities is not so

much an attempt towards finding a convenient way out of a mess as it is of pushing unpalatable truths under the rug until such time as they resurface, to test the patience and intelligence of a new generation of citizens.

It will perhaps never be possible to do justice in all the areas of politics and social life where injustice has been a glaring truth. More worrying, though, is the thought of whether, if at all, an attempt at restoring a sense of justice, at reasserting the place of morality in our collective national life has at all been made. The trial of Bangabandhu's assassins was a good move toward making people remember criminality at its highest perch. It would have been a better one had the powers that used to be not decided to set aside the role Khondokar Moshataque Ahmed may have played in the planning and execution of the coup in August 1975.

The mere fact that Moshataque had gone to his grave by the time the Awami League returned to power in 1996 was hardly reason for him to be allowed to go free. There is, after all, such a thing as a posthumous trial. And speaking of trials, posthumous or otherwise, or inquiries, you can only wonder why the murders of General Khaled Mosharraf and his colleagues in November 1975 or General Manzoor in June 1981 have not been investigated by the civilian elected governments that have been in office for the past sixteen years.

There is too the ubiquity of questions relating to the modalities that were applied in the trial of army officers allegedly involved in the killing of President Ziaur Rahman in 1981. Suspicions have lingered, all these years after the abortive coup in Chittagong, of a wider web of conspiracy than has been publicly spoken about taking hold of politics in 1981.

Contrary to General Ershad's assertions, elected leaders do not hand over power to military com-

manders. They merely see it slipping from their hands, or seized from them, by unscrupulous men driven by inordinate, less than moralistic ambitions. In April 1977, General Ziaur Rahman forced President Sayem from office before taking it for himself. The law or the constitution did not offer any basis for such a seizure of power.

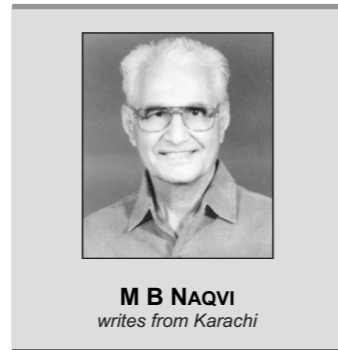
Back in 1975, no legal provisions existed to enable the commerce minister of the country to replace the dead President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Yet Moshataque made himself top dog, even as Vice President Syed Nazrul Islam was placed under custody.

The legacy is therefore terrible and bitter. The spells of military and quasi-military rule we in Bangladesh have passed through have done far graver damage to politics than the incompetence or crass opportunism of our political classes. The militarisation of politics, spawning as it has political organisations with roots in undemocratic soil and such monstrosities as the once well-promoted (again in the Ershad years) Freedom Party, has left liberal democracy badly wounded in Bangladesh. Add to that the corrupting of politicians, with all the bad odour that emanates from it.

Sixteen years into elected civilian government, our politicians still carefully stay away from a whole, wholesome, and public debate on national budget allocations for defence. That is a pointer to how the power of politicians to engineer change in the country remains captive to the legacy of the kind symbolised by men like General Ershad. Such men once seized power through subverting the will of the nation. The course of life has since flowed in directions we had rather stayed away from.

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Is world opinion comatose?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

PLAIN WORDS

What the victorious British and American did in 1948 was to make the innocent Palestinian Arabs to compensate the European Jews through the Israeli state. The Palestinians see no reason why they should pay for the sins and oppression of the Europeans. Israel's suppression aims at ending Palestinian Resistance. This oppression has lasted 39 years, nay since 1948. Israelis robbing and occupying Palestinian homes, lands and driving them out of Palestine is unforeseeable naked colonialism. For US, UK and Israel the norm of self-determination does not apply to Palestinians.

ISRAEL'S armed forces have bombarded undefended Palestinians, their government and what remains of Gaza's infrastructure after supposedly having withdrawn unilaterally. As one writes, Israeli helicopters have destroyed the offices of Hamas and Palestinian Prime Minister. Gaza's civic infrastructure, such as it had survived, is being systematically destroyed to deny water and electricity to the Strip's population by those who never tired of invoking the Holocaust in Europe. Aren't they executing another holocaust?

Israel's almost daily brutal military actions on a defenceless people are a crying shame. Its excuse always is retaliation against "terrorist" attacks. The alleged "terrorists" also claim their often suicide bombing to be in retaliation against Israeli atrocities. Can't this cycle of retaliations be broken?

Israelis have kept Palestinians confined to certain areas without any rights and when they protest they are labeled terrorists and punished in supposed retaliation. The ballyhoo on the arrest of an Israeli corporal and this invasion is also for retaliation. No one mentions the wanton killing of six innocent civilians on the beach earlier on which Hamas ended ceasefire and

retaliated. Israeli stress on Palestinians being mindless terrorists is mendacious. Who can forget that a militarily defeated and under Israeli occupation side has the right to resist. In resisting Israeli colonialism, the resister will use what armament and opportunities he has. Can the western mind not see the Palestine Resistance's limited options? Terrorism is the weapon of the weak the world over. Weren't major Israeli leaders and generals terrorists until 1948, criminals in law?

The strangest thing is that there is supposed to be a whole 'civilised' world out there, with thinkers, poets and diplomats. Can nobody see through the historic swindle of foisting Zionists on innocent people of Palestine? And if Israelis had been given a piece of land -- the 1948 UN given boundaries -- the civilised world should have prevented Israel from further aggrandisement. Irrespective of what Arab states did in 1948, what justification was there for Suez War? With 1967 war preemptive aggression Israel proceeded to virtually annex all Palestine areas and enslave all Palestinians, not to mention ethnic cleansing and making millions refugees in 1948. How moral and lawful that was?

This cycle of retaliations is juvenile and foolish. Secondly, for a supposedly democratic state to resort to targeted killings, mass raids on its own occupied population and destroying its infrastructure brings it down to the level of brigands and murderers. Palestinian violence would end the day Israel gives Palestinians the opportunity to protest and make demands in a democratic manner.

The US diplomacy is the second instrument through which Israel not only gets away with murder and terrorising the entire Arab world. Israelis have deliberately destroyed the power generating station and water distribution system. For how many days can the population survive without water? Whoever may try to find a way to restore water, the remarkable thing is that no Arab potentate has uttered a word of condemnation; there is loud silence and demonstration of utter impotence.

Factually US wants to undo the Hamas victory in a free election. For six months Israel and America have prevented Hamas government from functioning. Why? because it does not recognise Israel or agreements that Yasser Arafat or Abbas had entered

into. Doubtless Hamas is a radical pro-independence party; its charter has been liberation of Palestine. How can it disown its charter after being elected on that basis?

Why is this insistence on recognition? Israel is a hard military fact; every Palestinian lives under its jackboots. Everyone has to seek Israel's permission for doing this, that or the other thing; Palestine's revenues are collected by Israel and it does them out to the Palestinian Authority which it has withheld since Hamas formed its government. Which Palestinian does not extend his de facto recognition on a daily basis? What's in a de jure recognition? Can that not be withdrawn, if conditions change?

Secondly, Hamas has given clear hints that it will recognise Israel by signing a ceasefire; it has always wanted negotiations with it. Was that not recognition? It says it will accept a two-state solution. Israel and US are not being honest and candid; they are after destroying not merely Hamas government but also PA itself -- as a preparation for Israel's further unilateral solutions. Until recently one thought that world's humanitarian resources are enough to force even the Israeli-American combine to stop

short of total elimination of possible self rule by Palestinians. One is no longer sure. What is the point in discussing the merits of one or two state solutions; Israel is determined to impose its will.

Israel remains a conspiracy of Zionists with the British imperialists and the two imposed a colonial enterprise on backward and weak Palestinians, with US help. US and UK forced the UN to give its approval. The rationale was that the Jews had been badly oppressed over centuries in Europe -- and America. Therefore they needed help.

Fine. Europeans and the Americans, who oppressed the Jews for centuries, should have been forced to provide restitution. What the victorious British and American did in 1948 was to make the innocent Palestinian Arabs to compensate the European Jews through the Israeli state. The Palestinians see no reason why they should pay for the sins and oppression of the Europeans. Israel's suppression aims at ending Palestinian Resistance. This oppression has lasted 39 years, nay since 1948. Israelis robbing and occupying Palestinian homes, lands and driving them out of Palestine is unforeseeable naked colonialism. For US, UK and Israel the norm of self-determination does not apply to Palestinians.

Apparently nobody can do anything. Israel is militarily superior to all Arab states put together; Arab potentates are behaving like scalded cats. Most Arab states have actually betrayed the Palestinians and love dealing with the US and Israel in the name of prudence and self-interest. There is precious little that one can do except to raise one's voice against inhuman treatment of an unarmed people by a super-armed fanatical state. The question is: is world opinion asleep or comatose? One espe-

cially wants to know what the fair-minded people in the rest of the west (outside US) think of what is going on in what was Palestine. Do they feel any moral repugnance to what the Israeli colonialists are doing?

Why is Israel doing it? Because US wants it to do so. The US designs include a Middle East that is virtually run by Israel on its behalf. The Israelis have been nurtured as a proxy for the Americans. The responsibility for what the Israelis do belongs to Americans. It is not true that the Israeli tail is wagging the American dog; the nationalist Israeli lobby manipulates America and the poor dears are manipulated. This is nonsense. The clear American thinking has been adequately articulated by neocons, some of them Jews. The Twentyfirst Century Project is an American design, not Jewish. Look at the US democrats. Have they any new ideas? Do they reject the Twentyfirst Century Project? Americans apparently know of no other design for their country. If Democrats win, the script would stay the same. Insofar as the Israelis are concerned, the Democrats' support is as firm as, if not firmer than, that of Republicans.

The latest evidence is that the European Union is jerkily being brought back into a policy framework that harmonises with US designs. It looks as if the NATO commitments are more important for Europeans than what EU might come up with. The Europeans may have seen the limits of their power and the futility of diverging from American wishes. But the question is: does it foreclose the free thinking of individual citizens in the European continent?

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Crying out for leadership

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

THE fate of people, destinies of nations, and history itself are determined to a substantial extent by political leaders. Political leadership plays a pivotal role in addressing the national challenges at critical junctures for a country.

Poets, artists, scientists, engineers, researchers and administrators contribute to the national development through different disciplines and help enrich scientific, educational, cultural and socio-economic development.

However, it is the political leaders who coordinate all activities, make the most of all available talent and potential, and explore all opportunities to attain the goal of freedom and achieve success at a national level. All countrymen pay respect to these political leaders and statesmen. Such political leaders are remembered for their deeds and are glorified for their leadership.

Some political leaders were always key figures in their nation's history. Their perceived heroism and moral authority made them a source of patriotic inspiration and worthy of

respect and veneration. It is necessary to mention the names of a few leaders and statesmen who have remained immortal for their remarkable contributions and their historic speeches.

Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of US. Within six weeks of his assumption of office in 1860, civil war broke out between the North and the South of the US and continued for four years. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which eventually led to the liberation of all slaves in the US. He was shot on April 14, 1865 by an actor named John Wilkes Booth while attending a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington DC. Lincoln died the next morning.

President Lincoln delivered many speeches on human rights, democracy, and politics. Of these, the Gettysburg Address [November 1863] was most well known for its spirit and vision. Lincoln began his speech by saying: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

However, it is the political leaders who coordinate all activities, make the most of all available talent and potential, and explore all opportunities to attain the goal of freedom and achieve success at a national level. All countrymen pay respect to these political leaders and statesmen. Such political leaders are remembered for their deeds and are glorified for their leadership.

Lincoln defined democracy and merit of independence: "That this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

His sense of ethics is evident from the following quote: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right." There were many outstanding leaders in the history of the US and the world at large, but Abraham Lincoln was admirable because of his belief in democracy and because he sacrificed his life to establish human rights.

Around the world there were many great leaders who changed the history of their nations with their magnificence, charisma and, above

all, their patriotism. One of the great leaders was Simon Bolivar of South America. His contributions towards the independence of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, Venezuela were unprecedented.

Influential leaders in history include Sir John Macdonald of Canada, Sun Yet Sen of China, Otto von Bismarck of Germany, Sukarno of Indonesia, Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, Julius K Nyerere of Tanzania, Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Sir Edmund Barton of Australia among many others.

Queen Victoria of England, Queen Isabella of Spain, Queen Catherine the Great of Russia, and Empress Tzu-his of China made glorious

contributions during their respective reigns. Prime Minister of Britain Margaret Thatcher, Prime minister of India Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Srimavo Bandaranayke, Prime Minister of Israel Golda Myer were also applauded by their countrymen for capable leadership.

Some political leaders were almost deified for their political philosophy and patriotism. Their images were often elevated to the level of national symbols and featured on items such as banknotes, stamps and national memorabilia.

One of these leaders was Mahatma Gandhi of India. His philosophy of non-violence as a means of civil disobedience in order to establish swaraj inspired the people tremendously. At the same time, he motivated his followers to get rid of

discrimination based on colour, creed, and caste with commitment to truth and justice.

The fall of political leaders from the zenith of power was also observed in the course of the world's history. Josef Stalin was regarded by millions of Soviet citizens as a father figure. A wave of suicides was recorded following the announcement of his death, suggesting that some citizens had sincerely come to believe that life without Stalin was unthinkable and unbearable. Within just a few years, however, the scale of his repression became evident, leading to his denunciation by his successor Nikita Khrushchev and the removal of his body from the mausoleum where it had been laid alongside his predecessor, VI Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union.

President Suharto of Indonesia abandoned his post after 32 years in the face of student opposition. President Nixon was compelled to resign on August 9, 1974 due to the Watergate scandal. Nixon was a great supporter of Pakistan during the Bangladeshi liberation war. He laughed at Indira Gandhi, calling her an "Old Witch" when she went to the

US to explain the reasons for the war.

The Prime Minister of Japan, Kakui Tanaka, had to resign for his alleged involvement in embezzlement. West German Chancellor Willy Brandt who was awarded the Nobel Prize had to resign because his assistant was a German spy. The former Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, resigned as Railway Minister subsequent to a railway accident that he was held accountable for under the doctrine of ministerial responsibility.

This is a critical stage for politics in Bangladesh. The expectation of the people is that political leaders will overcome the controversial issues with their acumen, insight and their excellence in negotiation. In an article published in the New Nation on June 12, 2006, Mr. Mainul Hossain observed: "In our view, the present political leadership, either of BNP or Awami League, cannot save democracy or even their own leadership. The present party politics is either about corruption or about reckless violence. In short, the crisis the people are facing is the crisis of failed political leadership."

The crises the nation has to deal

with involve the issues of free and fair elections, dealing with corruption and reckless violence, and establishing good governance and rule of law. On the economic front, poverty reduction and attainment of the millennium development goals are fundamental objectives that political leaders must work towards in order to gain the confidence of the population.

The history of our civilisation and background of our multi-party political structure speak of overcoming serious challenges in the past. Parliamentary democracy is the basis of our system of governance. The parliament must be a house of talented and dedicated representatives who formulate laws for the welfare and development of the nation. It should not be a house of slander and slaughter, as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto intended it to be in early 1971. Our political leaders will hopefully withstand the test of time and make politics a more noble, dignified and prestigious profession to serve the cause of the nation.

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