# POINT \*\*COUNTERPOINT

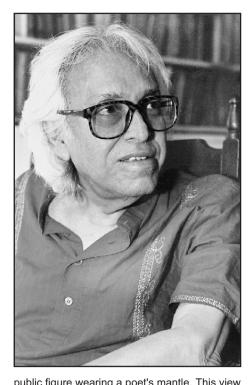
### **Shamsur Rahman: A tribute**

ZILLUR RAHMAN SIDDIQUI

HAMSUR Rahman left us on August 17. I am writing this obituary note on the 18th, barely 26 hours after his death. Ever since he was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit the Bangabandhu Medical University Hospital he was in coma. There never was a doubt that he was critically ill. A Medical Board was formed and the Board kept us reassuring that the ailing poet was receiving treatment at the international level, whatever that might mean. The management of visitors, since access into the room showed a strange laxity, was far from being of that standard. I, myself, was astounded when I found a cameraman from one of our TV channels, sitting next to his bed, taking pictures from very close quarters, and in an unhurried manner, with nobody opposing or protesting. It cannot be said, from the overall situation prevailing during those days, in and around the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital, that the poet was allowed to die in peace.

Shamsur Rahman became the leading poetical voice of our time. Quite early in his life, while still an undergraduate in the university, he made poetry the first vocation of his life. As a fellow student, studying the same subject, I can testify to this. During those early years, he quickly came to identify the latest trend in Bangla poetry, the trend of modernism set firmly by the group of poets conveniently called the Thirties Group. This group represented the cutting edge of Bangla poetry. The modern sensibility that marked his poetry almost from the beginning can be ascribed mainly to this early discovery. The fact that he was born, and grew up, in a city (not much of a city in those days by world standards but still a city) must have played its part in moulding the urban, and urbane, cast of his mind. Shamsur Rahman did not have to wait long before establishing a vital contact with the modernist poetry of the western world. The process was made easy by his access to English

Shamsur Rahman's transition, from an intensely private to a largely public mode of poetry, goes to explain his emergence as a



about him has gained general assent. But this overlysimplifies the real fact. Even before he started coming out of his private groove he had established his claim as the up and coming poet of his time. The turbulent 'sixties' drew him out of his alienation. Slowly, but inevitably, he reached a stage when his pulse beat with the same rhythm as his people's did. But here he achieved something quite uncommon. As a poet he gained new ground without losing hold of his old domain, his private world where he still retained much of his basic alienation, and his refusal to come to terms with the world as he found it. To any one surveying the corpus of his poetry it is preeminently personal as opposed to public. A poet is his individual self most of the time, and

public only on occasion. This is as true of

Shamsur Rahman as it is of Pablo Neruda. True, his so called political poems have struck a sympathetic chord in the public mind. They enjoy a wider circulation among readers. But who can deny that the mystery lies in the poetic treatment of a popular theme, the very personal poetic attire that the poet was able to weave for the

This naturally leads on to the issue of form and style. As a major poet he developed his individual poetic language, flexible, versatile flowing and, strangely enough, lucid. His metrical competence is amazing, though he was never bound to a strictly predetermined form. When he did submit himself to one, as when writing a sonnet, he managed to play with the set rules with a freedom which is striking. His diction varies according to the demands of the particular poem, moving from the rhetorical to the colloquial, never shy of using the strange, and the unexpected, word. And finally, he has his complete mastery over the language that he gained through sensitive, and particular, attention to its undiscovered nuances. In any one of his typical poems, one is struck by the clever intermingling of the strange and the familiar. He is able to impress, without trying to be impressive. When he is most personal, verging on the confessional, his disarming candor does the magic. It establishes a kind of rapport between the poet and his reader that largely explains his wide, and unfail-

ing, appeal as a poet. Shamsur Rahman won the hearts of millions across national boundaries, and to his own people he became a sort of an icon. He did it through the magic of his poetry, and through the complete emotional identification with a people lost in the wilderness of political foolishness and failings. When he spoke out, as he did often enough, his voice was resonant. He was a source of moral strength to a people desperately looking for light and guidance. His death is a terrible loss for all of us at this hour of gloom and despondence. A bereaved nation has paid its tribute to its illustrious son in a manner which will be remembered for many years

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui is a renowned educationist.

#### The terror of August

HASAN ZILLUR RAHIM

N Tuesday, August 8, I flew to San Francisco from London's Heathrow airport. The check-in was a breeze, and with a few hours to spare before boarding, I had time for some last-minute shopping: perfume, English biscuits, toffee, and tea.

The Virgin-Atlantic flight took off on time and we arrived at San Francisco a few minutes ahead of schedule. The only "inconvenience" I suffered was when I was among about 50 of my fellow-passengers. selected at random for baggage checkina.

My annoyance must have shown on my face because the security officer said almost plaintively as she checked the contents of my suitcases: "We are just doing our duty, sir!"

Considering the number of times I nave flown in and out of the country since 9/11, and this being the first time I had been thus "inconvenienced," I apologized for my impatience and assured her of my full cooperation. The entire process took about 10 minutes.

Little did I know that in less than 48 hours all hell would break loose at Heathrow and other British airports and also at major American airports. British police had apparently broken up a conspiracy to blow up 10 jetliners over the Atlantic, and over two dozen suspects were taken into custody, all Muslims living in Britain. Arrests were also made in Pakistan. including British citizen Rashid Rauf, identified as a key player in the plot.

A nightmare ensued for travelers. particularly those stranded in Britain. but with a rippling effect throughout the world. I couldn't thank God enough for leaving London when I

The inevitable backlash against

Muslims followed. Many American mosques were vandalized and Muslim women wearing hijab taunted and threatened. A Reverend labeled Muslims bloodthirsty barbarians, and a radio talk-show host dubbed Islam "a religion that is designed to cut off your head."

But there were also hopeful signs. The FBI worked with mosque-goers in major cities to boost security. Police in San Jose, California, where I live, proactively began guarding local mosques. San Jose may be unique: its police chief. Rob. Davis, had fasted the entire month of Ramadan in 2004 to show solidarity with the estimated 15,000 Muslims living in this pluralistic city.

As details of the terror plot unfold in the coming days, Muslims will be wondering what continues to lurk in the minds of some of their coreligionists. Is it the insecurity of their psyche in a modern world? Is it Islam reduced to a political ideology, instead of being a source of moral guidance? Is it the clash of utopian fantasies against dystopian reali-

If indeed certain radical Muslims sought midair martyrdom with horrific consequences, we have to

One can only guess

acknowledge that no amount of western sins (and there are many), attributable to foreign policy or racism or such, can justify such acts

Surely, with the memory of last year's 7/11 bombings still vivid in their minds, the English can be excused if they feel jittery and angry.

And always, in the wake of atrocities and foiled conspiracies the bitter question of societal integration of immigrants, or lack of it, comes

While in London, I watched on TV the third cricket Test between Pakistan and England at Headingley that England won by 167 runs. In the annals of cricket, this would hardly register a flutter, except that the architect of English victory was a 24year-old fast bowler named Sajid Mahmood.

Born in England of a Pakistaniborn father, Sajid was heckled by a small section of the immigrant crowd



as a traitor!

Normally, Sajid's father would have supported the land of his birth against England but Saiid insisted that must change: "My dad had some split loyalties, but I told him he had to support England during this series.'

I bring this up because of a provocative reference that the 1998 **Economics Nobel-laureate Amartya** Sen made in his recent book called Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny (pp 153-155).

It is the famous "cricket test" proposed by Lord Tebbit, a conservative political leader. Tebbit contends that British immigrants from the subcontinent and the Caribbean should support England, not the lands of their ancestry. Only when that happened could integration into British society be considered a

Tebbit's test may be considered idiosyncratic by some in the immigrant community but more and more, it could emerge as a telling divider between assimilation and retreat, between flexibility and rigidity, and even between living and delusional martyrdom.

A few days after my return from London, I visited our small San Jose mosque, nestled against the hills of the Diablo range, to offer the predawn prayer. Stars bloomed like flowers in the endless California sky. An impossibly luminous Morning Star rose above the hills, as if to greet early-risers. Above Venus was Orion and then, wonder of wonders, shooting stars began

It felt good to be alive, even if only to thank the Creator for His wondrous creation

Hasan Zillur Rahim is a computer scientist

#### The Night of Ascension

SYED ASHRAF ALI

HE Holy Quran states: "Glory of Allah who did take His servant for a journey by night from the sacred mosque to the farthest mosque, whose precincts We did bless -- in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for He is the one who heareth and seeth (all things)." (Sura Bani Israel, Verse 1). The journey refers to the Glorious Ascension (Mi'rai) of the holy Prophet Muhammad (SM).

It was on a Monday on the 27th of Rajab one year and five months before the emigration to the holy Madinah that the holy Prophet (SM) was first transported through a unique Night Journey from the Holy Makkah to the seat of the earliest revelations in Jerusalem, and then taken through the Seven Heavens, even to the Sublime Throne, and blessed with the unique opportunity to meet the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Rabbul Alameen

On that auspicious Night of Ascension (Lailatul Mi'raj) the Apostle of Allah (SM) was roused from sleep by the Angel Jibrayeel (AS) [Gabriel] who said: "Allah Jalla Jalaluhoo sends you greetings and He invites you, and I have come to take you to Him. Allah desires to show the Wonders and to dignify you in a manner as He has not done anybody else before. No one ever heard this nor could anybody ever conceive of it in his mind.

Accompanied by Gabriel, the holy Prophet (SM) went to the Holy Ka'aba, performed the circumambulation of Ka'aba (Tawaf) seven times and sat for a while in the Hatim of Ka'aba. Mounted on Borak, the holy Prophet (SM) was then carried to Masjidul Aqsa (Baitul Muqaddas) in Jerusalem.

There a huge gathering of angels received him very cordially.

The holy Prophet (SM) then led a two rakat prayer in Masjidul Aqsa in which all the one lakh twenty-four thousand Prophets participated. The Apostle of Allah (SM) then set out for the Heavens.

As the holy Phophet (SM) passed through various heavens. he met a good number of prophets and were also shown "Allah's Signs" in various shapes and forms. The holy Prophet (SM) had also the unique privilege to see with his own eyes Bahrun Nagam, the Great Sea, the waves of which wrought the deluge which inundated the whole world at the time of the Prophet Noah (AS). He also had the proud and unparalleled distinction of seeing during his lifetime Hazrat Azrail (AS), Hazrat Michayeel (AS) with the Great Scale (Mizan) and Hazrat Israfil (AS) with his Great Horn (Soor).

In the seventh heaven, the holy Prophet (SM) went to the mosque Baitul Ma'moor and led a two-rakat prayer in which participated all the angles of the Seven Heavens

As the holy Prophet advanced further, he reached Sidratul-Muntaha, the glorious Lote-tree which has been specifically mentioned in the Holy Quran. Sura Najm states: "Near Sidratul-Muntaha beyond which none may pass: near it is the Garden of Abode (Mawa).Behold, the Lote tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable). (His) Sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong! For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest." (53:15)

Rasulullah (SM) advanced further and reached Hijabe Zarbaft where Jibrayeel (AS) informed him that he was unable to proceed any further, According to Tafsir Ruhool Bavan, however. Hazrat Jibrayeel (AS) halted at Sidratul Muntaha.

The Apostle of Allah (SM) then passed through many a screen of

Noor and Zulomat and ultimately passed across Arsh and reached, in the light of Sura Najm, "the Highest Part of the horizon." "Then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer. (53:7-9)

> Prophet Muhammad (SM) had indeed seen the Greatest Signs of Allah. According to Tirmidhi, the holy Prophet (SM) said: "I saw my Rab with my eyes and Qalb" According to the Mishkat, the Apostle of Allah (SM) said: "I saw my Rab in His best appearance. I was endued with knowledge of whatever is in the Heavens and on

And it was on this Glorious Night of Ascension that five daily obligatory prayers were enjoined for the welfare and salvation of the Muslim

The holy Prophet (SM) then sited Jannat (the Paradise) and Jahannam (the Hell) and returned to Makkah

The Glorious Incident occasioned heat and debate amongst people holding that it was a vision or a spiritual dream or that the soul (Rooh) went on the journey but the body lay on the bed. But the holy Prophet's (SM) best companions and most of the Muslims during his period believed earnestly that the Glorious Ascension to the Heavens was definitely in person and not a

The detailed description of Mi'raj testifying to the physical flight of the Apostle of Allah (SM) had been narrated by at least twenty-six Sahabis and Sahabiyas including great personalities like Hazrats Abu Bakr Siddique, Umar Faruq, Ali-al-Murtaza, Abdullah ibn Abbas, Kulsum bint Rasulullah, Belal Habshi. and Abu Zar Gifari (peace be upon them).

In fact, the majority of the com-

This has a negative impact on

medium and small sized knitwear

manufacturers, as their total labour

supply and number of active

machines substitute each other in

the sense that most industries pay at

seem to be on the agenda of our

mentators take the Glorious Night Journey literally but some of them allow that there were also other occasions on which spiritual journey or vision occurred. Even on the conclusion of a miraculous bodily journey, which is certainly possible if and when the Almighty desires, it is conceded by some that the body was transformed into a spiritual

The dispute regarding the holy Prophet's Glorious Ascension in person originates mainly on the material conception of the impossibility of such a Journey with the physical body, totally forgetting the fact that there is nothing impossible for the Almighty, that He can do and undo anything and everything He desires, that He hath power over all things. He is the Best of planners and "when He hath decreed a Plan. He but saith to it. 'Be', and it is.' And if Prophet Abraham (AS)

could remain unhurt in the midst of the burning flame kindled by Namrood, if Prophet Jonas (AS) could survive inside the stomach of a whale for several days, if the stick of Prophet Moses (AS) could turn into a huge and fearful snake, if Prophet Noah (AS) could easily survive even when the Great Deluge inundated the whole world, if Prophet Jesus (AS) could see the light of day without the aid of any father, if Prophets Adam and Eve (AS) could be created without any father or mother almost out of nothing, if Gabriel (AS) could come to the world thousands of times, why should it be impossible for the Prophet Muhammad (SM) to Ascend to the Heavens to meet His

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## Peace in the Middle East



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAN writes from Madrid

LTHOUGH the declared aim of Israel's disproportionately violent offensive in Lebanon was to seek the release of two soldiers kidnapped by Hezbollah, in fact this was merely an excuse. Olmert had several other objectives in mind before starting this war. Besides destroying Hezbollah, Israel, at the behest of the United States, was going to help reshape the Middle East. Now that Irag was under American military occupation and most of the other significant Arab states had become subservient to America's imperial designs, the plan was to force Iran and Svria to toe the line.

US strategists had thought that this could be achieved through the destruction of Hezbollah and Lebanon. Hence the Dresden-like bombing of the Lebanese villages and towns -- more than 1000 bombardments in the first 24 hours of the invasion alone -- by US supplied warplanes. The goal was to set Lebanon's destruction as an example and to send a clear message to the Iranians, the Arabs and others: Look what will happen to you if you dare challenge the supremacy of Israeli-US alliance.

Olmert came to power with the oledge that he was going to set the final boundaries of Israel by unilaterally withdrawing from certain parts of the occupied territories leaving a Bantustan-like Palestinian state in

would be completely at the mercy of Israel. By destroying Hezbollah and Lebanon, Olmert wanted to demonstrate the power of US-Israel alliance and to send a warning to the Palestinians that they must accept whatever is given to them; otherwise they will face similar destruc-

No doubt, Lebanon has suffered badly. Leaving aside the loss of an unknown number of Hezbollah fighters, more than a thousand Lebanese civilians have been killed a million have been displaced, many villages and towns have been flattened, entire infrastructure of Beirut have been reduced to rubbles, numerous roads, bridges, power plants have been destroyed. et Israel has failed to destroy Hezbollah. It has survived the combined Israeli-US military and diplomatic onslaught for 34 days. Israel's much-vaunted military invincibility has taken a serious

According to some international correspondents, even "the beneficiary of the destruction (of Lebanon's towns and villages) is most likely to be Hezbollah." Thousands of Hezbollah members across the country are busy cleaning, organizing and surveying the damages done by Israeli bombings. Hezbollah and its leaders have grown in stature and are now hailed all over the Muslim world as heroes. whose examples are to be emu

Even al-Maliki, the prime minister of Iraq's American sponsored government has condemned the Israeli actions as crimes against humanity. Fouad Siniora, the pro-Western prime minister of Lebanon has felt so let down by American acquiescence in Israel's indiscriminate killing of Lebanese civilians by using American warplanes and bombs that he has felt compelled to ask why the US treats the Arabs as "the children of lesser gods.

Israel has not come out of this confrontation unscathed. Never before has it suffered such a sustained, indiscriminate rocket attack on its homes and factories inside its own territory. Never before have so many Israeli citizens been displaced from their homes to bunkers because of rocket attacks from a neighbouring country.

Until now with the unconditional support of its patron, Israel has violated the airspace of its neighbours, made land incursions, fired American-supplied precisionguided bombs on civilian targets and committed numerous assassinations with impunity and without fear of reprisal. But now Hezbollah has dealt a serious blow to its

Every state has a right to feel secure within its borders and that applies not only to Israel but also to its neighbours. Hopefully, this war may force Israel to redefine its live in peace in the Middle East, it must stop acting as America's deputy sheriff in the region and negotiate a comprehensive peace deal with all its neighbours in line with the Beirut Declaration of 2002. which guaranteed its security.

Israel cannot insist on the full implementation of UN resolution 1701 until it complies with prior UN resolutions which called for the return of all occupied territories and the creation of a viable Palestinian state along the pre-1967 borders. A comprehensive peace deal will force the guerrilla groups to disband or merge into the armed forces of their respective countries because the reason for their existence would disap-

Israel must realise that in the long run, its much- vaunted strategic alliance with the United States will not be able to guarantee its safety and security. In an article published in El Pais of August 14. Professor Norman Birnbaum, an American Jewish intellectual of great reputation pointed out that all strategic alliances are temporary and that at a future date the US would not hesitate to abandon Israel if it feels necessary to do so for its own strategic interests.



Refugees: Uncertain future.

# RMG sector: Survival of the largest?

a per piece rate.

government

**H**ASANUZZAMAN

HE lack of external initiatives for efficient infrastructural development in power and energy sectors, a "natural" component for any finished-goods manufacturing industry, and no appropriate measures to ensure a comprehensive trade organization, hang as a double-edged sword for the readymade garments (RMG) sector.

The first statement can be supported by the anticipated "Power Rehabilitation Program," worth Tk. 100 crore, only for the repair and

maintenance of old power plants. With the constant power crisis, large garment factories are switching to gas-operated generators, as operating diesel-run generators is becoming expensive.

On average, owners pay an overhead cost of Tk. 4,000 to Tk. 6.000 per day for diesel-operated generators. Although the cost of gas is low compared to the price of fuel, switching to and maintaining gasoperated generators would be a small sized firms that play an effective role in the total export earnings.



Despite knitwear exports nearly reaching woven export level and our neighbours taking giant steps to capture a larger share of international apparels market, RMG industry that regularly accounted for more than 75 percent of export earnings high overhead cost for medium and and elevated standard of living of a social class, making appropriate investments in accordance with our neighbours' standards does not

> While Pakistan plans supplying gas to 425 towns and villages during the next two years, India reduced its customs duty on natural gas from 10 percent to 5 percent, somewhat decreasing dependence on fuel and stabilising its rising price. Sri Lanka has initiated Thulhiriya Complex -- a dedicated textile zone in addition to Horana Textile Processing Zone -ensuring stable power and water supply, thereby reducing internal lead-time. India has also increased its spending on Technology Upgradation Fund (TUF) by 19 percent for textile sector and plans to

launch Jute Technology Mission by the end of this year. Unsurprisingly our government seems ignorant of the setting up of proposed garment villages by various important bodies.

Withdrawal of duties on yarn, spare parts and raw materials provide a responsive avenue for 'tailors" at the possibility of "cultivators" encountering an external shock relating to the price of yarn and other raw materials in the international apparels market. Extension of tax exemption and rebate for two vears till June 2008 bestowed the textile industries with a larger degree of advantage in a comparatively protected domestic market, supported by complexities in importing raw materials at entry ports Interestingly, as the prices of exported finished apparel items are descreasing, the volume exported and the prices of raw materials that are imported have been, simultaneously, increasing

Therefore, if the textile industries produce inferior yarn compared to our neighbours, its adverse effect will be felt right across the apparel value chain and Bangladesh will successfully maintain status quo in the lowest category of finished products chain. If Bangladesh retains its position in such category of low value-end items, the RMG

sector would be in a stalemate situation with its competitors, whereby no market or product diversification would be necessary to facilitate further development.

No solution has been found to the existing power supply crisis in areas such as Narayanganj, a hub of medium and small sized knitwear firms. Switching to solar power, as an effect of Energy Development Fund, would only be sweeping dirt already under the carpet. For the last two years, several garment owners (mainly medium and small sized firms) failed to meet shipment deadlines due to inconsistent power supply.

Consequently, some of them forced workers to work irregularly, in order to maintain an economic break-even situation, and a satisfying image. With the prices of finished apparel items decreasing and volume exported increasing, together with a price-hike of essential commodities, in conjunction with an unreliable power supply, the ongoing dilemma between owners and workers can be viewed as a cumulative causation of the consequences of government inaction.

The budget has allocated Tk 20 crore for skill development programs for RMG workers; however, lack of appropriate monitoring

administrative bodies has made it difficult for economists to assess its effectiveness in apparel industry. Whereas India has increased provision for handloom sector by almost 20 per cent, Sri Lanka has adopted measures for the development of its fisheries sectors; conversely, we have overlooked poten tial sectors that could have a thriving role in global market, for example, handloom sector.

Chittagong and Benapole ports, which in economics logic substitute for each other as access for importing raw materials and other accessories, have become complementary as consequence of facing higher lead time. Furthermore, the political dilemma regarding form of ownership of the New Mooring Terminal coupled with the clash between feeder-vessel operators and BGMEA members are a few examples that demonstrate barriers to an effective economic port for exporters, particularly for medium and small sized RMG firms.

On the other hand, given Bangladesh's minimal role in negotiating successful deals at international conferences, regarding progress and diversification of RMG sector, it is safe to state that Bangladeshi exporters could be in a deadlock situation after 2008.

The Tariff Relief Assistance for Developing Economies (TRADE) bill, initiated two years ago for free access of Bangladeshi goods to the US, along with so-called lobbyists to serve domestic exporters' interest is relevant to our insignificant role in international trade deals. Safeguards imposed by the

United States and the EU against China till 2008 will allow exporters to exploit international apparels market in a determined category of low value-end products in terms of both large volume and low price. Interestingly, during early 2005, China shipped an amount to the US that Bangladesh could not produce in last three years combined, the direct consequence of uninterrupted power supply to Chinese

exporting sector. Many doomsday predictions had been made in regards to the apparel sector. However its auspicious, and persistent, growth set all cynical theories at bay, to the credit of the knitwear division. This is being done at the cost of low priced items and large volume of exports, by virtue of which, medium and small sized firms are withheld from meeting worldwide compliance standards, whereby they may disappear in the long run. One could argue that amount fixed for

renovation of power and energy sector is crucial in realising its potential level for appropriate utilisation; however, such measures are direct cause of whitecollar crime and also inadequate in meeting increasing demand for power generation.

Given the close-door policy nature for power and energy sectors, alongside facilities provided to other sectors, one can only predict continuous volume increase in knitwear exports, with prices decreasing whereby it becomes a game for "survival of the largest." Knitwear exporters have exported their products even to China, and its position of low-value end products in the apparel value chain will trigger future challenges and remain questionable regarding its inferior apprehension. Woven exports urgently need resourceful and continuous backward linkage support externally from our cotton producing neighbours, if medium and small sized firms, who cannot afford to be composite on their own. are to take part in the long-run.

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