

## Jail killing

### A black chapter in our history

NOVEMBER 3, 1975 will remain etched as an ignominious day in the history of Bangladesh. The killing of the four national leaders in custody is surpassed in its brutality and cold-blooded mayhem only by the killing of Bangabandhu and his family three months before. It was a part of very well conceived long-term plan to divest the country of its top leadership.

We join all those who are committed to the ideals of our glorious War of Liberation in paying our deep respects to the four martyrs. There is little doubt that without their astute leadership the nine months of our liberation war would have been much longer than it actually was.

Recalling the manner of their death fills us with remorse but of equal sadness is the fact that the four leaders have been all but forgotten by the nation and the present generation does not evince much interest in the extraordinary contribution of the four leaders, particularly in the uncertain early days of the liberation war. This reflects our psyche as a nation and the very truncated nature of the society, broken up into various camps, that prevents us from rising beyond our narrow minded parochial partisan position and acknowledging the contribution of our heroes that they rightfully deserve.

While the state-level recognition is lacking, not surprisingly, one could well ask whether the Awami League, the party that the four stalwarts had dedicated themselves to, has done enough to ensure that they attain permanence in our history, except for the yearly rituals restricted to activities that are only transitory in nature?

Regrettably too, justice has not yet been done to the dead and the bereaved families. Even though the most reprehensible Indemnity Ordinance have been scrapped, and the lower court has passed a judgement on the case more than two years ago, almost 29 years after the incident, the death reference has not come up for hearing in the High Court as yet.

While we cannot bring back the dead it is for the nation to ensure that they remain indelible in our memories. The legal aspect of the issue is of equal significance since the implementation of the court's verdict will determine whether the rule of law will prevail in the country.

## Education trip

### Merit should be the sole criterion

A report published in this newspaper yesterday gave an account of how an education trip to South Korea was arranged at the last moment for the schoolteachers loyal to the immediate past government. Clearly, the objective of the trip was to increase the skills but the teachers were not selected on the basis of merit and four out of the 25-member team are "accompanying officials" having nothing to do with teaching.

It has further been reported that BNP supporters in the education sector were rewarded with foreign trips many times by the minister and the state minister. The problem with such a policy is that merit becomes the ultimate casualty. The country has an acute shortage of teachers, which makes it difficult to raise the standard of education in general.

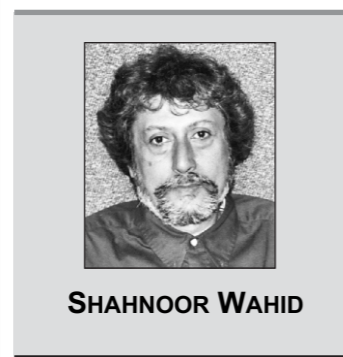
Of course, attending training programmes abroad can benefit teachers, but what's the point -- if we don't view it from the party standpoint -- of selecting political elements whose credentials as teachers are very much doubtful? If loyalty to the party becomes the only criterion for judging a teacher's merit, the end-result will be further deterioration of the standard of education. And the education sector won't deliver, despite having the highest budgetary allocations.

The party and the individuals responsible for selecting the undeserving teachers failed to place the country's interest above party priorities. And there is reason to believe that this happened in all other important sectors as well.

The damage that has been done to the cause of good governance by this kind of doling out of political favour is colossal. Nobody expects the government departments and ministries to be reduced to places where ruling party leaders and activists will resort to grabbing opportunities of all types at any cost. The party in power must not be under the impression that it can do anything and everything to attain its selfish goals.

The caretaker government has to address all such issues in order to make sure that those getting benefits in gross violation of rules and regulations are brought to book.

## A tale of two Moududs



SHAHNOOR WAHID

THE country is in the solid grip of two Moududi doctrines. One, that of their religio-political guru Abul Ala Maududi, is being preached and practised by Jamaat-e-Islami; and the other, that of the immediate past law minister, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, is being practised by BNP.

We are apt to conclude that because of the profound influence of the two Moududs in their respective parties that Jamaat and BNP had agreed to the marriage of convenience five years ago. And now see for yourself how successful that marriage was!

Now, let us indulge ourselves in a short analysis of the doings and undoings of the two Moududs that we are blessed with. Abul Ala Maududi is long dead but he has left an indelible roadmap-to-power for the followers, which is being implemented inch by inch by Jamaat in Bangladesh.

Jamaat leaders and workers have proved their ability to withstand all sorts of pressure, know-

## SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

The media, for five long years, kept on hearing from him how many committees, sub-committees, and sub-sub-committees he had formed to expedite the issue. Then, finally at the fag end of the tenure of the alliance government, he looked devastated, almost on the verge of tears, when he told the media that he had completed the task, but only because of lack of time (!) he could not place it in parliament!

ing well that in Bangladesh pressure groups lose steam pretty soon. They know that they have come a long way and now there is no looking back. In fact, as the saying goes, they have burnt all the boats behind.

Therefore, it is only natural that to climb further up the ladder Jamaat would wait for the "veteran politicians," the so-called *dharok* and *bahok* (promoters and protectors) of democracy and secularism, to keep wavering, waning, declining, degenerating, slipping and falling. And the latter has done so, again and again, to help the cause of Jamaat. So, in pursuance of the religio-political doctrine of their leader Abul Ala Maududi, Jamaat has "sacrificed a lot" and in the process covered a lot of ground. It is only a matter of years now for Jamaat to swim to absolute power, thanks to the canal dug by the others. This is the boon of having a Moudud(!) in Jamaat.

Now let us turn our eyes to the Moudud in BNP. This particular Moudud is a uniquely charismatic personality who has graced the

*darbar* of almost all the rulers in the history of Bangladesh. Many call him the *Chanakya* of Bangladesh. He is very much alive and kicking, and he is kicking lots of people in the most uncomfortable body zones, metaphorically speaking. He has proved to be a clever, extremely intelligent, and fast-thinking politician, and you need his kind to win political battles. The days of talking rubbish to hoodwink the people are over.

Let's try to digest this fact with a grain of salt. Politics is a billion dollar game and the only goal in this game is getting to power. There is nothing half-way or half-hearted or half-done about it. One has to play this game with ruthless precision and dogged determination. Barrister Moudud knows how to play this game and make his team win. He believes in winning. He loves to win. He knows that no one will serve the goal on a silver plate. Therefore, right from the beginning he took the defender's position in BNP like a seasoned player.

While in the game, Moudud

used his gray cells instead of his tongue to attain his objectives. For the last five years his gray cells worked overtime and faster than the collective tongues of the opposition. He knew what he would have to do to get the chosen person as the chief adviser in the caretaker government and he kept at it until he achieved the goal. He even knew what he would do in case their chosen person was rejected by the opposition. The result: Prof Iajuddin Ahmed holding two posts.

Then again, he knew what kind of machination would be needed to keep the Election Commission singing their song. For the entire five-year period he knew what to do to keep the files on the separation of judiciary traveling between his ministry and parliament. No matter how loud the opposition and civil society screamed, shouted, cried, or pleaded, he kept his legendary cool and smiled sweetly(!) before the electronic cameras when confronted with the question.

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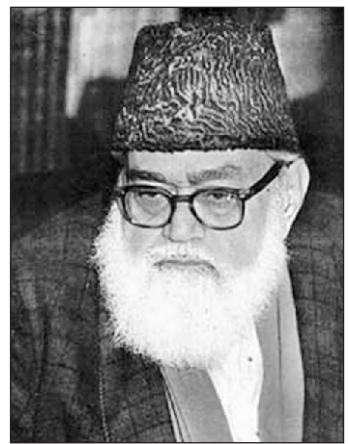


Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Abul Ala Maududi

kept on hearing from him how many committees, sub-committees, and sub-sub-committees he had formed to expedite the issue. Then, finally at the fag end of the tenure of the alliance government, he looked devastated, almost on the verge of tears, when he told the media that he had completed the task, but only because of lack of time(!) he could not place it in parliament!

There is no alliance government around at the moment, but Moudud is very much around to rob the opposition of its sleep. He is seen taking part in television talk shows with a saintly(!) smile fixed on his lips and a copy of the constitution in his hand.

The latest Moududi mangling came in the form of a news item in this daily on Saturday. The headlines screamed: "Moudud's sudden move stays graft body work." Inside it is reported that, amid



growing demands for investigation into corruption of ministers and officials of the immediate past government, former law minister Moudud Ahmed on Wednesday moved against a High Court order and got the functions of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) stayed until January 21.

So, you see, even outside of power Moudud Ahmed continues to do little, little things for his party. It's amazing stuff really, whether you like it or not. There is a consensus of thought that all the existing and future political parties should have someone like Mr Moudud on the team to keep the opposition pulling their hair out. He is *ekai eksho*, by Jove!

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## The agony of democracy



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IT is not easily explicable as to why a country mired in poverty but aspiring to continue on its democratic path despite obvious difficulties that a poverty stricken society bedeviled by kleptocracy suffers, and when the political parties are apparently committed to democratic principles, that Machiavellian intrigues are resorted to for holding a parliamentary election which prima facie under the existing conditions would not be acceptable to the great majority of the citizens of Bangladesh.

It is not easily understood as to why the Honourable President (for Brutus is an honourable man) at this age plagued with fragile health decided, in clear contravention of the provisions and spirit of the constitution which he swore to protect, to appoint himself as the head of the caretaker government.

It is equally baffling as to why the Honourable President has decided to keep charge of the key ministries vital to holding a free

## GOING DEEPER

Can Bangladesh and the international community afford to have a chaotic densely populated country in an increasingly globalized world? If the result of a manipulated election is violence and counter-violence, then the possibility of the emergence of non-state or extra-constitutional actors, however unwelcome they may be, cannot be ruled out.

and fair election. Are we to assume that Francis Fukuyama is right, after all, that four conditions: the level of development, culture, neighborhood effect, and ideas have to exist to facilitate democratic transition and its sustainability?

Virtually all industrialized countries are democracies (India and Costa Rica being exceptions) and once a country attains per capita GDP of six thousand US dollars, which ipso facto encourages growth of educated property owning middle class, democracy establishes its roots in the political structure of that country.

But democracies' sustainability becomes questionable "in a society that is close to subsistence, that does not have any kind of resources, have very low level of education, very severe ethnic and other kind of cleavages."

But then such situation could be applicable to countries of sub-Saharan region riddled with ethnic, religious, and tribal differ-

ences and certainly not to Bangladesh. Bangladesh has both the craving of the people to be ruled by those to be elected do so; Bangladesh also has neighborhood effect of the world's largest practicing democracy. One, therefore, cannot but be worried by the implacable binary opposite views reflective of Manicheans held by the main political combines on vital issues relating to elimination of a manipulated administrative structure and the election commission already put in place to favor the outgoing ruling party in the forthcoming polls. In the event this structure is not dismantled and the people are faced with the distinct possibility of having the ultra-rightist and Islamist combine as the next government in Bangladesh, not because it has been chosen by the people but because it was manipulated to be so, then anarchy and economic desolation is sure to follow.

Can Bangladesh and the inter-

national community afford to have a chaotic densely populated country in an increasingly globalized world? If the result of a manipulated election is violence and counter-violence, then the possibility of the emergence of non-state or extra-constitutional actors, however unwelcome they may be, cannot be ruled out.

The worry expressed by the international community, particularly by the established democracies, about the volatile political situation in the country is completely understandable. The West has realized at long last that "democracy deficit" in countries, even in far-flung areas of the world is not to their advantage.

It is now recognized that if people are denied the chance of making their own choices, particularly in Muslim societies, then the possibility of the emergence of Islamic extremism to which Bangladesh already had a violent introduction becomes a distinct possibility.

The West should have valid reasons to be worried and their advice, sometimes considered intrusive by a section of our society still wedded to the concept of Westphalian sovereignty, should be listened to and where possible adopted and adapted to our own peculiar requirements.

We are indeed fortunate to be Asians because the 21st century is widely believed to be the Asian century. Phenomenal economic growth posted by China along with impressive Indian presence in the global theater should be matter of great satisfaction and inspiration to us.

Instead of blaming our colonial masters of bygone days that our underdevelopment is not internally generated but is a consequence of global structure of domination, we should try in concert with others, particularly with the neighboring countries, to graduate from the status of a least developed country of the Third World or even the Fourth World.

We know that we can, as we have already proved through our impressive growth in the ready-made sector despite the end of MFA and in our overall export sector. It is true that the fruits of our growth did not have an egalitarian distribution because the rich-poor divide widened with every passing year due to distortion in the market caused by unbridled corruption and syndication by dishonest businessmen sheltered by the

immediate past government.

Unfortunately, incessant criticism by people from both at home and abroad had little effect on those who held the reins of the government till the other day. Besides politicization of purely economic decisions forgetting that in this globalized world, like Alice in Wonderland we have to run all the time to be in the same place, has often arrested the economic growth of the country.

Considering the rise of Islamic militancy, massive corruption in governance, selective illegality in law enforcement, brutal repression of opposition political parties, increase in the number of ultra-poor, failure to control price of essential and provision of utilities had rendered life unbearable for the common citizenry of the country for the last five years.

Unless the people get the chance to change the government through a free and fair election by completely overhauling the election commission, the bureaucracy, and the law enforcement agencies, and ridding these institutions of party loyalists and incompetents, Bangladesh will face a bleak future. One hopes that the Honourable President, the head of CTG and the group of advisors will be able to help the country to get through this critical phase in our history.

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## Credibility of the caretaker government



ANM NURUL HAQUE

WITH the swearing-in of ten-member council of advisers on October 31, the fourth caretaker government (CTG), headed by President Iajuddin Ahmed begins its three-month journey towards holding the next general election in a free and fair manner. A titular president transforming himself into an omnipotent statesman, now wields the scepter of all constitutional and executive powers of the president and prime minister for the interim period.

President Iajuddin Ahmed himself took the office of the chief advisor (CA) of the CTG in a controversial manner, ignoring the relevant provisions of the

## BY THE NUMBERS

The onerous responsibility of leading the country toward normalcy now rests on the shoulders of the advisers, who are committed and patriotic persons. All are distinguished in their respective fields and expected to do their bit in greater interest of the nation. The advisers including the CA must remember that any step undermining the credibility of the CTG can plunge the nation into more troubles and a very high price may have to be paid by the nation. The CTG must have that much courage to withstand pressure from any quarter and must rise above even the appearance of partisanship.

constitution as Justice KM Hasan declined to be the CA of the CTG, bowing to public pressure. The 14-party alliance leaders showed a very good sense to call off their agitation and accepted the president's assumption of the CA's position conditionally. They placed a set of 11 demands to the president and CA to meet to prove his neutrality.

Assuming the additional position of the CA of the CTG for supervising the next general election, slated for January 2007, the President Iajuddin Ahmed committed a mistake in his first step, asking the political parties to furnish names for appointment as advisers. The constitution

nowhere stipulates that the names of the advisers should be proposed by the political parties. Obviously, there will be the apprehension that the political parties will forward names of their cronies in aspiration of being served their interest during election.

Would it be wrong to assume that the mainstream political parties influenced the selection process of the advisers of the CTG who are in some way or other affiliated to any political party? Media reports revealed that the administration of oath of the advisers was held after last minute bargain with the political parties. If the non-party CTG has to function neutrally, political

parties are the last entities to be expected to furnish the names of non-partisan advisers. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as the CA of CTG picked up his advisers in 1991 without consulting any political party.

The President and CA of the 4th CTG have hit a new controversy by keeping all the most vital ministries and divisions under his fold. This has triggered speculations about his ability to handle all these ministries efficiently. If the president and CA himself is capable of shouldering all the responsibilities, then there is hardly any point of appointing a 10 member council of advisers. This move of the CA has been viewed with

suspicion.

The CTG has a clear constitutional mandate to prepare the ground for holding a free and fair general election and to supervise it. The 4th CTG will have to shoulder an overwhelming responsibility for creating a congenial atmosphere in the rough political weather in which to conduct the election. So it must go about doing what it is mandated to do in the crying need of the nation.

The Citizen Group-2006, a platform of the country's civil society members, has already put forward 19 point suggestions for the CTG. On electoral and political reforms, the group said that the CTG would have to ensure a neutral, efficient, and competent election commission to conduct the national election 2007 in time and it has to be fully vigilant in maintaining law and order situation.

The BNP-led coalition government at the last minute of its tenure has given mass promotion to many civil servants. The selection of officers for promotion superseding the seniors was done considering their loyalty to the BNP and its major coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami. The

administration has been nakedly politicized and infiltration of key posts with a clear intention of election engineering. Unless this process is negated through a series of courageous moves and reshuffles, the prospect of holding a free and fair election will remain bleak.

Depoliticizing the administration has now posed a major challenge to the CTG to ensure an even-playing field for all the contending parties in the election. Some of the top posts in the civil and police administration have already been reshuffled. CTG must continue the process for there are yet a very large number of secretaries and other officials whose loyalty to the now departed government has been a major factor.

The opposition leaders have voiced resentment at the way transfer orders of some key secretaries have been cancelled, either to revert back to their original posts or to place them in a position of even more important and influence. This has definitely eroded the credibility of the CTG.

The crucial factor in holding a credible election is the credibility of the EC. But the EC's credibility

has already been undermined by a series of events. The EC is supposed to be manned by neutral and non-pliable personalities. But the palpable partisan conduct of the election commissioners (CEC MA Aziz in particular) and their machinations re the voter list, has caused the EC to lose the credibility when it comes to the question of the next general election being free and fair.

A free and fair election is what millions in Bangladesh are now craving for, with the next general election only two months away, as a general election has a greater significance in our parliamentary form of democracy. Unfortunately, the rigging of election in Bangladesh was often done in the recent past and is still pervasive.

The unique system of CTG, as enshrined in our constitution, has drawn the attention of constitutional experts across the world. The 13th amendment to the constitution has been made with a definite purpose to ensure neutrality of the persons who run the non-party CTG. We shall be able to reap the benefit unless the system of CTG is either manipulated or coerced to serve the

partisan objectives.

The 14-party alliance has extended the November 3 deadline by a week and warned the president that if he fails to carry out the 11-point task, they would enforce indefinite blockade program across the country. Though not all, but two points i.e. depoliticizing the administration and reconstituting EC have assumed the overtones of national issue.

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