

Tribute to Zia

The nation today will pay tribute to Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman who was assassinated on this day in 1981 by a group of rebel army officers at the Circuit House in Chittagong. By the time of his unfortunate demise President Ziaur Rahman had earned the love and respect of the people of Bangladesh who poured out in hundreds of thousands to participate in a massive show of sympathy for him when his body was flown to Dhaka for burial. The news of his killing dealt a severe blow to the nation which was beginning to get a sense of direction following the steady leadership he provided after coming to power in November '75.

By all description Ziaur Rahman was an unlikely candidate for political office. He chose a military career and there he would have perhaps remained. But fate had something quite different in store for him. His dramatic emergence in the political life of the Bengali nation took place on 27 March when his voice came over the radio urging the people to carry on the armed struggle which had spontaneously started following the Pakistan army's launching a genocide on the civilian population of the then East Pakistan. His role during the liberation war was exemplary and inspiring. As one of the sector commanders — and a leading one among them — he played a crucial role in leading our armed struggle towards its successful end. Following the emergence of independent Bangladesh, he was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff in which capacity he made significant contribution in planning and organising the future Bangladesh Army.

Following the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and after months of chaos and misrule Ziaur Rahman, by then a Major General, became the rallying point of an uprising — popularly called Sipahi Biplob — that brought him to the helm of affairs of the country.

Fate and providence had propelled him to the height of power and here his capabilities were to be put to the severest of tests.

Once in power his initial challenges were to restore order in the armed forces and a workable administration in the government. He performed both the tasks competently.

As a political figure no one is spared controversy and criticism and as such neither was he. Among his most controversial acts was to restore to politics men who actively collaborated with the occupation army of Pakistan and worked against the liberation war, the most notable being Shah Azizur Rahman who was made the Prime Minister in his cabinet.

Shaheed Ziaur Rahman's political career was unbelievably short — spanning a mere ten years, from 1971 to 1981. It is a testimony to his remarkable abilities that his impact lingers on among a people whose political memory is known to be notoriously short. The love and support of the people that he had gained during his short tenure as President was principally due to the fact that he was able to convince the people about his commitment to public good. His honesty people admired. In his push for an action oriented government, people found a reason for hope. There was a definite development thrust in his administration that convinced even his opponents that we as a nation was perhaps beginning to move. It is no mean achievement that the party he founded — the Bangladesh Nationalist Party — was voted back to power ten years after his death, and much of the votes coming as a tribute to his lingering memory.

Fall of a Leader

It is sometimes impossible to predict how a political leader will fall, with a bang or a whimper, in disgrace or in a mood of resignation. But there is something particularly sad about the decline and possible end of her career as a politician of Winnie Mandela, until recently, a powerful figure in the African National Congress (ANC). True, she owed much of her authority to her position as the wife of Nelson Mandela, especially during the long imprisonment of the ANC leader. However, there is little doubt that, over the decades, she had acquired a stature of her own and rendered valuable service to the liberation of her people in South Africa. All this has now been acknowledged by her husband from whom she is now separated, Mr Mandela, more in anguish and sadness than in anger and recrimination.

Winnie Mandela has now been expelled from the presidency of the Johannesburg region of the ANC Women's League, along with the entire executive which was the power-base of the disgraced leader. Now, new election will follow, setting the stage for a reorganisation. The process may touch the whole movement, but hopefully not the objective or the core leadership of the party.

Soon, all this will be in the past, although there may be continued speculation as to what brought about the moral decline and fall of Winnie. Maybe right inside her character, there were weaknesses and fatal flaws, such as love for violence and greed, which were aggravated by decades of hard struggle, separation from her husband and inevitable stresses and strains of life of a politician that she was not equipped for. Here, it must be said to the credit of Nelson Mandela that he has handled the situation — so it seems from here — with forthrightness and dignity. It is all very sad. One consolation is that the fall of Winnie came about before she became the First Lady of South Africa, as the wife of Nelson, a distinct possibility that she must have found enticing. The country has been spared of an African Imelda Marcos.

PEOPLE in Sri Lanka are not impressed by India's ban on the LTTE, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. It is a non-event for them. I was in Colombo within three days of the announcement, and it had already been debated, dissected and dropped. Except Mrs Sirtimavo Bandarnaike, former prime minister, who welcomed the ban, nobody else, not even the pro-Delhi intellectuals, considered it of any consequence. "Why did you train them in the first instance? This is how every discussion ended."

Former president JR Jayawardene said that Sri Lanka did not trust India. He wondered what the ban would achieve when after the imposition of the emergency in Sri Lanka, the LTTE stood automatically banned for indulging in "subversive activities". He had no hesitation in singling out Mrs Gandhi for the LTTE's militancy. He recalled how he begged her not to give it arms and how she did exactly the opposite.

Official reaction is cautious. It does not want to ban the organisation which, it claims, is sending feelers for accepting a status within Sri Lanka. Confirming this is Mangla Mookingha, chairman of the 50-member parliamentary select committee which is examining various proposals for choosing the one that the LTEE may accept.

President R. Premadasa has also put all his hopes — and efforts — in the select committee's basket because he has failed to retrieve the LTTE on his own. Neither has his talk with the LTTE's, representa-

LTTE: India's Embarrassment

tives spreading over several weeks borne any fruit, nor has his gesture of supplying arms in the LTTE during the clearing operation by the Indian Peace Keeping Force. The effort to involve Australia and the Commonwealth Secretariat has also gone awry.

The Select Committee's chairman, who is in constant touch with Premadasa, says that the government will unilaterally impose within three months the formula they agree upon, even if the LTTE rejects it. Whatever the reason for the chairman's optimism the situation on the ground is dismal. Colombo has no control over Jaffna, the north of Sri Lanka. The area is, de facto, the Eelam, and independent Tamil state. The LTTE collects taxes, runs administration and even issues passports. How any formula without the LTTE's concurrence can be implemented is beyond my comprehension.

On the other hand, the select committee is a divided house. It has yet to decide how to reconcile the Tamil demand for letting the merger of eastern province with the north stay with the Muslims' contention that eastern province be separate. The Muslims and the Sinhalese are 60% in the province against Tamils 40%. The merger is a temporary measure, part of Jayawardene's accord with Rajiv Gandhi, and it is to be ratified through a referendum, which the LTTE opposes. Even if the merger were to become permanent, there is no certainty that the LTTE would withdraw its de-

mand for Eelam. Nonetheless, some leaders believe that the LTTE can be brought round by granting its autonomy in the north. "Something like Article 370 which gives a special status to Jammu and Kashmir may be a way out," said a Sinhalese leader who wants to remain unidentified. The unification of north-east province is not considered too high a price to pay for a united Sri Lanka. Tourism minister S. Thondaman, who heads the Tamil plantation workers congress, about New Delhi's reaction, how soon it would begin to call Sri Lanka's military operation "the genocide." Jayardene told me that no sooner had his forces surrounded the Jaffna fort, the LTTE's stronghold, Mani Dixit, then India's high commissioner to Sri Lanka, called on him to administer the warning that New Delhi would not sit silent. Rajiv Gandhi's decision to send the IPKF was "O God sent opportunity" Jayardene recalled. "If only our government had allowed it to operate for the

The truth is that all political parties in India have been supporting the LTTE in the past because New Delhi's policy was to help them. The successive Tamil Nadu governments went along, particularly when the general feeling in Tamil Nadu was that the New Delhi could help Bangladesh is to liberate themselves from Pakistan but not the LTTE who represented 'the Tamil sentiment'. True, that sympathy has dried up. But now at this point in time to go back and accuse anybody of helping a particular militant group is nothing but hypocrisy. Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalitha said only six months before Rajiv Gandhi's assassination at a public meeting: "If the LTTE, in its present struggle against the Sri Lankan government was defeated, the entire Tamil race in the island would be destroyed."

As for India, it will needle the LTTE and Sri Lanka by demanding the extradition of Prabhakaran. It is ironic that he escaped justice in Sri Lanka in 1976 after murdering the mayor of Jaffna and sought refuge in India. Colombo at that time requested New Delhi to hand him over but it did not do so. Now India is seeking his arrest. But there is one difference: New Delhi could have handed him over but did not do so, Colombo cannot even locate him. "You are not able to catch smuggler Veerappan, how do you expect us to catch Prabhakaran?"

The real blame lies on New Delhi's shoulders. Under Mrs Gandhi's orders the RAW, our CIA, trained the LTTE cadre, financed it and armed it. Mrs Bandarnaike believes that Mrs Gandhi did so because she did not like Jayawardene, then at the helm of affairs. Jayawardene says that it could possibly be one of the reasons but his suspicion was that she wanted to placate M. G. Ramachandran, then the Tamil Nadu chief minister, who shielded R. Prabhakaran, the LTTE chief, because he was training the AIADMK men to beat up the opponents. "Many in New Delhi believe that Mrs Gandhi's imperious style of governance

was responsible for the arming of the LTTE. Whatever be the reasons, both Sri Lanka and India face an irretrievable situation. Colombo appears to have decided to live with it until something also cropped up. There seems to be an unwritten agreement between Colombo and the LTTE. Sri Lanka does not pursue, punish or push them. And they, in turn, do not disturb the country. A few years ago when I went to Colombo it was virtually a cantonment. This time it was crowded with tourists, with no policemen in sight. As for the bureaucrats, the guilty ones still occupy the position of power. Some day the story will come out. When it happens, all Indians will have to hang their head in shame.

Between the Lines Kuldip Nayar

believes that the LTTE will respond to a definite, properly spelled out offer. His proposal is for "an institution of autonomy" and "real" devolution of power to provinces. So far, even after the accord, many admit that the transfer of power to provinces has essentially remained on paper. The point that the various exercises underline is Sri Lanka's conviction that it cannot effect a military solution. Foreign Secretary argued that they could "technically" take ever Jaffna but it would mean the killing of hundreds of people and "we will be back where we were." Some military experts said what they do after taking over Jaffna because the population was not with them. Colombo is also uncertain

Islamic Fundamentalism: Implications for US Policy

Americans Should Hear All Views on Islam

WASHINGTON: Americans need to hear a diversity of views on Islamic fundamentalism in order to better understand the movement, US Representative Mervyn Dymally said on May 20.

Dymally, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, stressed the point during the panel's hearing on Islamic fundamentalism in Africa and its implications for US policy.

The hearing provided an opportunity for members of Congress and their staff, journalists and ordinary citizens to hear the views of Dr. Hassan A. al-Turabi, secretary general of the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference in Sudan, and a large panel of US experts on Islam.

The hearing was not without controversy. As Dymally reported, some members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee were opposed to giving Dr al-Turabi a public forum in the US Congress.

Dymally stressed that the subject of the hearing was "vital to US foreign policy interests" and that Americans

should be exposed to a diversity of views on Islam, including those of Dr al-Turabi, in order to fully understand the movement.

"Our Democratic system provides us with the opportunity to hear divergent points of view. It is not the intent of this subcommittee to embrace or encourage any particular ideology. We are simply trying to educate ourselves and the American public about a subject which may have tremendous significance for our future," Dymally explained.

Asked by Dymally to define Islamic fundamentalism, al-Turabi said the movement is an "intellectual renewal" movement that seeks to translate its ideas into social reform in opposition to "traditional societies that have become decadent." He characterized the movement as "liberal and forward rather than dogmatic and reactionary."

Dr al-Turabi said that Islamic renewal tends to be moderate and gradual in societies where it is recognized and allowed to express its views. On the other hand, the Islamic movement tends to be

radicalized and quickly grows in power in societies where it is suppressed, he said.

If Islamic renewal is allowed to take an evolutionary form, al-Turabi said, the movement "strictly observes the rules of the democratic game."

Dr al-Turabi said that Islamists promote social justice in their economic programmes and espouse liberal economic theories such as free enterprise. The movement is against corruption and "for a spirit of consensus rather than confrontation," he added.

Under strong questioning by several members of the committee, al-Turabi denied that minority and women's rights are violated in Sudan. He said that Islam promotes the tolerance of minorities and that women are active in all forms of public life in Sudan. Questioned on the treatment of non-Muslims, particularly Christians, he said there is no tension between non-Muslims and Muslims in Sudan.

Dr al-Turabi said the Islamic world is open to interacting with the West. While the Islamic world does look to the

West as a challenge to its ideology, al-Turabi said, the West's democratic ideals are also viewed as "a model to emulate."

Daniel Pipes, director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, called al-Turabi's explanation of Islamic fundamentalism more theoretical than real.

Pipes challenged al-Turabi's denials of human rights violations in Sudan, of the presence of Iranian Revolutionary Guards training the Sudanese military and the flow of arms from Iran into Sudan.

Taking a more strident view than his colleagues at the witness table, Pipes asserted that "fundamentalists are a danger to their own people and to the United States. The United States should block the progress of this movement."

However, Sulayman Nyang of Howard University, stressed that "fundamentalists are not going to disappear. No one can wish them away. They must be dealt with...."

Nyang, a Muslim from Gambia, underscored the importance of reporting fairly and accurately on Islamic fundamentalism and of under-

standing its historical context, and sketched out the economic, political, social and cultural conditions which gave rise to the movement.

Michael Hudson, of Georgetown University, told the panel that while Islamic fundamentalism has "some anti-Western characteristics," the movement "is not inherently anti-American."

Hudson called on the West and the Islamic world to work for a greater understanding of each other. Both societies should "reject negative stereotyping and underscore shared religious values," he said.

Hudson cautioned that the West "should not adopt a confrontational stance" towards Islamic fundamentalism; instead, it should develop "a sophisticated multi-dimensional approach" to the movement.

As part of this approach, Hudson suggested the United States encourage the social welfare and economic liberalisation aspects of Islamic fundamentalism.

The United States should also "keep discussion going on the question of the compatibility of Islam and democracy,"

he said. He urged that the United States use the "same critical standards" for Islamic fundamentalism as it does for other regimes, by looking at human rights and minorities and women's issues.

John Esposito, of Holy Cross College, agreed that the United States should approach the Islamic movement "in the same way it would approach other populist movements and other states" and look at the gaps between rhetoric and practice.

Esposito said the United States should encourage "self-determination and the respect for popular will" for both secular and Islamic groups in the region.

Mary Jane Deeb, of American University, also stressed the importance of US support for pluralism and democracy in the region. In addition, she strongly encouraged the United States to promote foreign investment in the private and public sectors of the region.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism "is very closely tied to the economic problems the region faces," she said.

Vietnam: The Party's Not Over Yet

THE Vietnamese Communist Party reluctantly admits free-market reform is the only way for the country's troubled economy but it is still resisting challenges to its authority.

Analysts say the supremacy of the Party, one of the world's last Communist holdouts, is being shaken by eroding popular support and rifts between aging hardliners and young reformers.

A special session of the National Assembly early next month to approve amendments to the country's Constitution is expected to become a platform for challenges from younger party members who are pushing for more rapid economic and political reform.

The Assembly will be taking up more than 100 amendments to the 147-article Constitution, which was adopted before the Party launched its economic reform policies five years ago. Approval of the new Constitution will be followed by elections to a new National Assembly in June.

The changes are intended to tackle widespread corruption and administrative inefficiency, reasserting party discipline and control, streamlining the bureaucracy and furthering economic reforms.

Reformist officials say they expect resistance from the hard-nosed bureaucrats and provincial leaders who prefer to trudge their own path.

"We want to bring back discipline and order in the provinces by making constitutional changes," said lawyer Phung Van Thu, National Assembly Vice-Chairman who helped draft the amendments.

The Party faces enormous gaps between the central and local governments. The new Constitution will give Hanoi new powers to check the defiant and free-wheeling officials

The supremacy of the Vietnamese Communist Party is being challenged from all sides — but it is hanging on. Rajiv Chandra of IPS reports from Hanoi.

who run local governments as personal fiefdoms. Provincial officials have also repeatedly defied enforcing national tax laws. "The central government worked out a taxation law two years ago," said Thu. "But in the provinces, they still say they're not ready to levy taxes."

Party fissures could widen when the new Constitution comes into force.

Said a Hanoi-based diplomat: "It [the new Constitution] is a conflict of generations, symptomatic of the struggle within the government between the young who want change and the elders who block it. And this won't be the end of it."

Observers say it is unclear how long Vietnamese Communism can last. Though the Party retains vestiges of popular legitimacy from years of opposition to colonial powers, party recruitment has plummeted and members at all levels wonder what revolution and their past sacrifices have bought.

Economic reform and capitalism, most of it centred in the cities, is replacing socialism as the new by-word. It has given birth to new problems that the Party "has not been able to anticipate, let alone manage and control," says Carlyle Thayer, an Australian specialist on Vietnam.

Thayer says another serious strain on the Party are disgruntled army veterans who, after massive demobilisation and severe economic hardships, have become politically organised.

They too demand changes. Before the Communist Party Congress in the summer of 1991, hundreds of generals and colonels were retired under suspicion of threatening the leadership.

"We came only with our guns and knapsacks. Now these officials have cars, videos and big houses," said a bicycle rickshaw puller who was a communist guerrilla when Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) fell in 1975.

Blaming the erosion of Communism on subversive capitalist tactics, the hardline military hierarchy has become a bitter opponent to reforms,

analysts say.

But in contrast to China's communists, Vietnamese leaders show willingness to accommodate some measure of change and criticism. Since 1986, when the Party launched nationwide reforms, more than 50,000 party members have been purged for corruption and misdeeds, according to the Vietnamese official media.

In the past six months, Party Secretary-General Duong Muoi has wooed restless intellectuals and students to head off further disenchantment. Even then, analysts do not see a strong challenge emerging from the current introspective mood in Vietnam. Critics or advocates of change are quickly taken to task.

In December, for instance, the Party's Central Committee censured its own newspaper, Nhan Dan, and the editor, Ha Dang, for not being able to stop the well-publicised and embarrassing defection of deputy editor Bui Tin to France.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Income-tax
Sir, Few days back our Finance Minister has said in a meeting that income tax evasion was most rampant in our country and the number of assesses should be increased to meet additional expenditure of Tk 1800 crore for the next financial year. Our Finance Minister himself being a chartered accountant should be aware that for decades people have been psychologically hesitant to pay income-tax because of its complex rules and subsequent harassment of assesses.
All citizens would have paid their due taxes had our governments created a clear and simple rule. Our income-tax rules are so complex that even income-tax officers and lawyers get confused. This leads to unwanted mental torture and pressure on assesses resulting in system loss in tax collection as mentioned by Mr Jamal Uddin Ahmed, a noted chartered accountant and former deputy prime minister in Late Ziaur Rahman's government, in one recent statement.
While our government misses no occasion to proudly announce the liberalised investment and industrial policy, surprisingly there is no mention of government's intentions to liberalise and simplify the income-tax laws for all cat-

egories of assesses to synchronise with government's liberalisation mood.

Like sales tax has been replaced by the word "VAT", had income-tax been replaced by the words "Development Tax", then perhaps the psychological fear would have decreased and assesses would have been aware that they are paying tax for development and their hard earned income is not being "snatched away". Whatever may be the name, the tax should be minimum 5% and maximum 20% with clear and simple rules so that our society may never hear anything known as "black money".

**Ziauddin Ahmed,
Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.**

ME peace process
Sir, Kindly convey my thanks to Mr Muehuddin Ahmed for his article "Fifth Round of Peace Talks" (13.5.92). I am tempted to add something.

When the Gulf war was severely battering Iraq, a popular demand grew momentum from the length and breadth of the globe to the effect that all cases of excesses done elsewhere by others should be taken out together with that of Iraq on Kuwait for an appro-

appropriate decision and action against the delinquents. Mr Bush, who was piloting the war on behalf of non-Iraqi combines, did not pay heed to that for obvious reasons. ME war ended by end of February '91 and about 14 months have elapsed since then and by this time the peace loving peoples and nations of the world have seen the 'outcome' of efforts to ensure peace in the Middle East. By this time Soviet Russia faced a debacle thus consolidating the power in the US making it unique in the arena of world politics, since no more any balancing of power exists.

The patience of Muslim nations has already exhausted. Mr Bush, because of his strategic position, now can sway the destiny of any issue in whatever way he likes. It was the US (and also UK) which played the instrumental role in the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel much against the will of Muslim countries of Middle East. It is a

matter of great pity that the sufferings of the Muslims are also owing to the disunity among the rulers of these oil rich states. It is high time for them to take stock of events as to how and for whom the enemies of Islam have played so long and can still play the game.
Mr Bush and his company's only aim is to coerce tacit recognition of the state of Israel by the helpless Muslim states. There may be many more talks and summits which can well be mere time-killing pursuits with no tangible result. In view of what we have seen up to this time we would appreciate if the architects including Mr Bush could give us a fixture of events to follow.
Something compatible to the will of the majority of the people in the area is necessary, nothing else.
M Ibrae Gias
Passey, Dhaka.