

An Algerian Tragedy

As we know from our own history, a political assassination disrupts a normal constitutional process and sets an unpredictable chain of events in motion. This is what may happen in Algeria where president Mohammad Boudiaf was shot and killed on Monday. The North African state now faces uncertain prospects in tackling its pressing problems in all different fields, perhaps with new beginnings in a number of crucial areas.

A veteran fighter for Algerian independence from France, Boudiaf, 73, had returned home from a 25-year-long exile to take power in January after an army-inspired coup had removed his predecessor, Colonel Chadli Bendjedid and cancelled the national parliamentary election. As a move, the latter was probably more crucial than the former. The cancellation of the poll apparently robbed the Muslim fundamentalists of what was expected to be a landslide victory. What's more, the fundamentalists, grouped together in the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), saw their platform banned in March.

The FIS had its reasons for getting rid of Boudiaf through assassination on Monday. However, press reports from Algiers suggest that other factors had made the situation more complicated than what it looked soon after the killing. Although the veteran freedom fighter was expected to be only a figurehead transitional head of state, presiding over a five-man Supreme Council, dominated by chiefs of three defence services, he had lately developed his own political ambitions. After supporting the Supreme Council's decision to imprison about 10,000 FIS activists, at the time of banning the extremist organisation, he had started releasing small groups of fundamentalists in order to gain support of a cross section of Algerian people. At the same time, he had been talking about holding a presidential election in 1994, with himself as a candidate.

Through these changes in the original game plan of the Supreme Council, Boudiaf might have made new enemies, within the armed forces or in the ruling National Liberation Front.

Whoever might have been responsible for the assassination — a man in a military uniform fired the shot and was himself killed by guards — Algeria does face several grim challenges. Despite uncertainties in their role in the assassination, the fundamentalists are sure to make the maximum gain out of the changed situation. They will do everything in their power to get the ban on the FIS withdrawn by the authorities and insist on the holding of the national election. All that the Supreme Council or the ruling party can do is to buy time by imposing a martial law on the country.

There is little doubt that the wind is blowing in favour of FIS, thanks to the authoritarian system which had been in existence in Algeria since independence, not to mention the mounting economic problems which successive governments had failed to tackle with any measure of success. If a multi-party system had remained in force and successive administrations had pursued pragmatic economic policies, instead of half-baked socialism that relied heavily on large subsidies, this gas-rich state, with an educated elite, might have been in a completely different situation. Whether other two North African states, Morocco and Tunisia, will learn from Algeria's mistakes, past and present, remains to be seen. Meanwhile, friends of Algeria in Europe and Asia will be watching the developments there with concern, with a hope, slim though it may be, that it can come out of the ordeal without any bloodshed and without losing its secular national identity.

Well Done

The Bangladesh team to the Manila Chess Olympiad returned to Dhaka on Monday. The only man available to say well-done to the boys and girls was the chef de mission of the team himself. We want to join him in lauding the Bangladesh team's performance. In fact, we are sure the whole nation will be with him in wishing the chess olympians congrats and demanding better attention to the international promises of Bangladesh in this game.

Our women's contingent have been placed 27th out of 62 contending teams. It scored equal points with England, India, Mongolia, Israel and Slovenia. Rukhsana Gulshan Nikkon earned a silver medal scoring 5 points in 7 outings and Shabana Parveen Nipa bagged a bronze scoring 8 in 12 matches.

Our men's team, handicapped as it was from the start by the absence of Grand Master Niaz Murshed and National champion Rifat bin Sattar, couldn't possibly have been expected to do better than what they have done — occupying the 60th position out of 102 national teams.

It is extremely painful to know that both our teams had to fly back home without playing their last round of matches in which they offered walk-overs to their opponent. Why? Because of management problems created at the very outset back at home thousands of miles away. If they chose to play the final round they would be forced to stay back a full week without any other thing to do and without, more importantly, any means to do so. Such was the arrangement made before the teams set out on their journey. It can be pleasing to think about our still better position on the final score board in case our boys and girls could play those last round of matches but that can hardly heal our sense of outrage over the airlines-booking scandal that made the teams to retire prematurely. We would like very much to see the persons responsible to be taken to task in a manner that would discourage repetition of such national calamities?

By the way, who is it who will answer as to why our one and only Grand Master doesn't play for the nation? If it is for any fault of our chess authorities, let that be brought to light and things duly rectified. If it is for any genuine lack of co-operation and feeling for the nation's prestige on the part of Niaz Murshed, he must be told this wouldn't enourish him with his admiring fans and would rather call for actions that can disadvantage him in his chess career. However, we shall keep on hoping that in the very next national outing Niaz would be there helping the nation reap unprecedented laurels without needing to resort to harsh measures of any kind against any quarter.

There can at the moment be hardly a truer statement that Bangladesh has a very promising situation in world chess. Let us all utilise this opportunity.

The Carnival at Rio: The Gains and Losses

OPEN EYE: BY VEDETTE

As expected, the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, ended in a them-and-us debate that produced a carnival of noise and rhetoric but little action. The industrial nations, in effect lecturing 'us', the developing countries, not to grow at cost of the environment, having committed the crime themselves. 'Us' accusing 'them' of being the biggest polluters and demanding that they pay up front to clean up the environmental mess.

It's a shame, the Rio outcome, because the problem is no longer one of them and us. It has become everybody's. When tropical rain forests come down in Asia to provide disposable chopsticks for Japanese homes and restaurants, the world's climatic balance gets disturbed. When wasteful and overconsumptive Americans guzzle gas like nobody's business and choke the atmosphere with harmful emissions, the entire world gets warmer.

There was little awareness at Rio of this common danger and the need to find a common answer. The protagonists came prepared for battle, highly suspicious of each other's motives. There was a lot of outcry, but only to put the other side down, not to reach a *modus vivendi*. Protecting jobs and protecting growth became the only issues.

Protecting the environment over the longer future became secondary.

In the end, the shortsightedness prevailed. There were some promises of cash to support a global environmental clean-up and a couple of watered-down treaties that place no obligations on anybody.

It was not possible to conceive of any other outcome when 'them', particularly the United States, viewed the conference as an attack against their coveted lifestyles that had to be defended, and 'us' suspected it was designed to keep them poor forever, a 'conspiracy' that had to be fought off.

Both were right and both were wrong.

On the one hand, it is unfair, to say the least, to ask developing countries — many of them trying to overcome extreme degrees of poverty — to keep a lid on their growth desires if industrial nations will not remove the fat off their presumptuous lifestyles.

On the other, it is impractical to expect industrial nations to change their ways if developing countries are not prepared to rethink and redirect their own economic efforts.

A solution should lie somewhere in between these two extreme points of view, and to look for a middle position requires an understanding by each side of the other's particular problems and concerns.

At Rio, such an understanding was never evident. If poverty, as it is often acknowledged, is the biggest of all polluters, the developing world must be given a chance to try and get out of it. And, to be able to do so, it must grow. But the fact of the matter is, growth raises people's expectations and lifestyles, which means more cities, more housing, more electricity, greater exploitation of resources, more factory space, more cars, more roads, more golf courses. Undeniably, all this has an impact on the environment. It is usually adverse.

At the other end of the growth spectrum, affluence becomes as big a polluter, if not bigger, as poverty itself. We see its evidence throughout

the industrial West, in the US in particular. And the evidence is growing by the day, as the Earth Summit was repeatedly warned.

Thus, Mother Earth is under a double attack: from those who are developed and will do nothing to rein in the polluting ways of their affluence, and from those who are developing and will not be deterred by the polluting ways of their development.

It is in this context that the question of the earth's environmental future becomes so crucial.

One has got to strike a mean between overaffluence and underdevelopment. Where exactly that mean should lie, it is difficult to judge. But the developing countries must accept the fact that, beyond a certain level, growth becomes as harmful as poverty. Likewise, the industrial nations must understand that, beyond a certain point, affluence chokes on itself, more than it chokes others.

That is the naked truth. We must have the honesty and the courage to face it. Let's not worry too much about the immediate dollars and cents to clean up the environmental mess. If the US will not pay up, there are others who will. But I am not talking about a one-time clean-up. More important is to make the clean-up itself sustainable, and that requires a different kind of motivation and

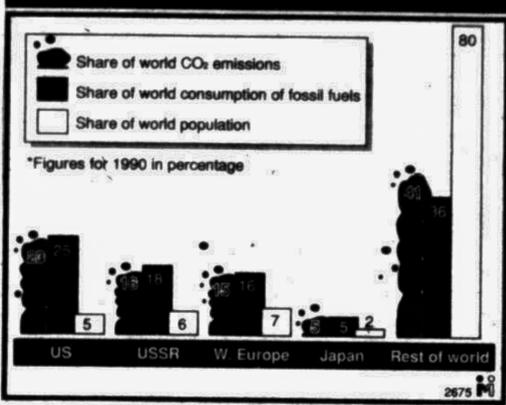
action. I am talking of the future, not of ours, but of our children's and their children's of the unborn humanity's, a future when our inaction today is bound to catch up with them in the rainless prairies of this earth, in its treeless valleys, in its dying seas and rivers, in the dust and decay of its gasping cities.

Only in an interdependent world can a livable environmental mean be found. Nations must learn to depend on one another, instead of trying to copy and compete in thrills in which others may have a better economic advantage. This precious little world of ours that we are trying to protect must be viewed as a common facility for the entire mankind, with nations sharing the economic burden and shouldering economic responsibilities.

If the world has to live by competition alone, if every nation must duplicate and protect for itself every economic activity on earth, if market forces are not allowed to rearrange economic activities on a global basis, if the developed as well as developing nations will not outgrow their futile sprits of economic nationalism, then no amount of cash and certainly no amount of good will can stop the pillage of our environment.

There is no other way to a safe environmental future. Only an interdependent world can be a truly sustainable one.

Who is to blame?



Ghana Gears up for Return to Democracy

Kabral Blay-Amihere Nieman writes from Accra

It was more than 10 years ago that a young soldier overthrew Ghana's elected government, imposed military rule and banned party politics. But now the people of Ghana have adopted a new constitution and are getting ready to elect a new government. As Gemini News Service reports, presidential hopefuls and political parties abound in Ghana — preparing for their first election in more than a decade.

In Ghana newspapers are proclaiming it "Party Time Again."

On May 18 a decade-long ban on party politics was lifted and the country is now set to return to constitutional rule in January.

The long rule by the military began on December 31, 1981 when a 34-year-old retired soldier, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, overthrew the constitutionally-elected government.

One of his first acts was to ban party politics — which he claimed were the bane of his country's development — and soon the young soldier translated his own phobia into national policy.

Ghanaians, according to Rawlings, wanted an African-rooted participatory democratic culture. HE set up Cuban-styled committees for the defence of his revolution and swore that Ghana under his control would never allow the return of a Westminster-type parliamentary system.

Justice D F Annan, a retired Appeal Court judge, was given the additional duty of coming out with a brand new African-based democracy.

So determined were Rawlings and his Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) to create an original African democracy — a departure from "what takes place in Bonn, Washington, Paris and London" — that when the wind of political change for multipartyism started blowing over neighbouring countries, the Ghanaian authorities boasted their country had already made the

transition to a real democracy. For them, what mattered most was prosperity, not flirtation with alien ideological models.

Said Rawlings: "What we need is economic development, fair prices for our exports and not scorns from the West about democracy."

But the government seemed to have had a change of mind in June 1990 when it launched a national debate to decide the political future of the country.

The consensus at the end of

the debate was that Ghanaians wished to return to party politics in spite of all its shortcomings in the past, particularly in the 1950s when politics in the country were characterised by violence, described by one former head of state, General Kutu Acheampong, as the "rancour and bitterness of party politics."

In August that year a history professor, Adu Boahen, and a journalist, Kwesi Pratt, launched a Movement for Freedom and Justice to spearhead the struggle for return to constitutional rule.

As a result of both internal and external pressure, the PNDC government finally changed its mind and in September last year set up a 258-member Consultative Assembly to draw up a new constitution. This constitution was adopted April 28, paving the way for the lifting of the ban on party politics on May 18.

According to a time-table for the return to constitutional rule, presidential elections will be held on November 3 and parliamentary elections on December 8, with January 7 as the date a new government will take up office.

Party politicking has already begun in earnest. Many groups have announced their formation of new parties, including the National Convention Party, sponsored by former trade unionist and Ghana High Commissioner to Zimbabwe John Tettegah; the Peoples' National Convention, led by former head of State Hilla Limann; the New Generation Alliance Party, led by a lawyer, Kwaku Baah; the Peoples Heritage Party led by a former parliamentarian, Alhaji M S Far; and the Busia Danquah Club.

Ghana: the road to democracy?



- 1957 Achieved independence from Britain under Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah
- 1966 Nkrumah deposed. Military council takes power
- 1969 Prof. Kofi Busia gains power in free elections
- 1972 Busia overthrown by Lt-Col Ignatius Acheampong
- 1978 Lt-Gen Frederick Akuffo overthrows Supreme Military Council
- 1979 Akuffo overthrown by Flt-Lt Jerry Rawlings. Rawlings reintroduces civilian rule
- 1981 Rawlings dissolves civilian government
- 1988 Failed coup against Rawlings
- 1992 Ban on political parties lifted

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.

Bangladesh Medical College

Sir, Please accept our heartfelt thanks for your informative item "Dhaka Day by Day: Good News for the Medical World", published in your esteemed daily on the 29th June, about our Bangladesh Medical College.

However, I am sorry to bring to your kind information that there are some incorrect information published in the article which requires correction.

At the present there are 47 full time and 14 part-time teachers for our total 228 students which makes a teacher-student ratio of 1:5 (one teacher for five students).

Prof M I Chowdhury
Academic Director and
Principal (Hony)

"What is Sugandha?"

Sir, I am writing this to express my deep appreciation for your editorial "What is Sugandha?" in June 18 issue. Such an editorial has been long overdue and could not have come at a more appropriate time. The incidents mentioned in the editorial have been agitating my mind for quite some time and I am very pleased that your timely editorial ventilates these sentiments eloquently. Such things could not have passed unnoticed in a democratic country like the USA even for a day and should

not also go unnoticed in our country which has now a democratic set-up.

M Rahman
Bardhara, Dhaka.

TV commercials and decency

Sir, Authorities in Bangladesh Television seem to ignore totally the basic norms of decency and sensibility while selecting their commercial ads. Collecting revenues through telecasting any kind of commercial material seems to be the "be all and end all" of BTv. Without going further into speech-making, let me make my point clear through citing the following three examples:

1. There is one commercial on a certain brand of coconut oil, wherein a bunch of street corner teddy boys accost some teenage girls on the street and proffer them a certain flower (of the same name the brand is). The teenage girls in the film requite to the leery advancements of the boys by equally salacious gesticulations and songs. Is it not a direct encouragement to our roadside Romeoos who are already a headache for the city dwellers as positive public nuisance? I think this outrageous advertisement should be forthwith withdrawn from

BTv's commercial schedule with a suitable decent replacement.

2. While there is at this moment a worldwide outcry for the preservation of the environment and the flora and fauna of this planet, BTv could not care any less about it. This is stunningly reflected in a commercial on a certain brand of shoes (keds). In demonstrating the quality of the shoe the wearer tramples under his foot a poor frog. How silly? Can we really afford to teach our children this kind of cruelty to animals? Is this any way to project the message of a product's quality?

3. In yet another ugly commercial relating to a certain brand of lungi, a comical character falls asleep from the pleasant "feel" of that particular kind of lungi. This is also in utter bad taste.

There could be a dozen more such examples of idiosyncrasy and senselessness about which the writer of this letter could write in your paper. But that is not the point. My question is when are we going to put an end to showing such outrageously vulgar and indecent materials on our TV?

MA Salam
Larmit Street, Dhaka

Vegetarianism

Sir, My attention has been drawn to Prof. Zahidul Haque's letter, published in your daily of June 6, concerning vegetarianism. May I, through your esteemed column, take the opportunity to congratulate Mr. Md. Faizullah, Prof. Haque's learned colleague, on his excellent idea of forming a vegetarians' club.

As a matter of fact, a strict vegetarian is the one who neither eats meat nor even fish and eggs. The vegetarians' club, as is proposed, may aim at campaigning vegetarianism as a system of diet in our society. I happen to learn from a friend of mine staying abroad that the faith in vegetarianism is also growing on the people in the western countries from day to day. Moreover, some physicians are of opinion that patients can be virtually cured by the regulation of their diet. They tend to prescribe vegetarian diet to their patients as a curative measure.

Nitin Roy,
Faktreepool, Dhaka.

Hartal and democratic right

Sir, We demand establishment of democracy in the institution of hartal, that is, people's freedom to participate in the hartal or to reject it by doing normal activities. On the first day of the transport strike while I was passing through a certain city street I witnessed some pickets damaging 'Mishuks' and beating the drivers. One driver was seen bleeding from his head and he was in an unconscious state.

Is it not the democratic right of a citizen to accept or reject a hartal call? Would the hartal-makers provide money and food to the working people which they have to earn through the day's hard work?

Let the leaders first establish democratic norms and values in the institution of hartal before going to establish true democracy in the country through calling and observing hartals.

M. Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor,
BAC, Dhaka.

OPINION Stripping of Degree

It was with great shame and sorrow that I read in June 25 newspapers about the expulsion and stripping of Honours Degree of a student of Dhaka University for assaulting a teacher.

That the student would be expelled and his degree stripped irrespective of the finding of the Disciplinary Board and other bodies, was a foregone conclusion when the University Teachers Association went on a strike from 6th June, demanding above punishment without awaiting the Disciplinary Board's recommendation.

University was coerced into taking a decision by a group against an individual who was not even present to defend himself. This group had no regard for the students who were sitting for their Honours and subsidiary exams, which had to be postponed because of the strike. All the students were made hostage by the teachers. If they had the slightest sense of responsibility, they would have continued with their classes and let the Disciplinary Board carry out their work.

One can imagine what grave provocation would compel a student to assault a teacher, and that too a student of Master's Class, in a discipline as difficult as Physics where, we know, only the top students are admitted.

None of the University correspondents of any newspaper have published the reason that caused the student to act violently while all the newspapers published the news of the assault.

I understand from some of the students of Physics Department that there was a unfriendly relationship between this student, Anwar Ali, and the associate professor, Mr Badrul Alam, and this resulted in the student failing three times in his honours exam for subjects taught by the Associate Professor. This continued to the Master's Class and in one of the Practical Exams, the Professor gave him zero mark. This led to argument culminating in the assault.

Unlike Board exams, in the university, the exams are con-

ducted and papers corrected by the teachers themselves, and thus a vindictive teacher can cause harm to the students.

I do not condone the act of assault, which should be punished by all means, but should not the teacher be pulled up? After all what sort of a teacher is he who invites violent reaction from students.

I refuse to believe that all the teachers are superior beings and their personal feelings do not influence the marking of the papers.

University authority has taken away Anwar Ali's Honours Degree as a punishment. But is it a fair decision? He obtained his degree because he passed the examination, and by taking away his degree what the authority indicating is that he is not qualified as a Honours pass student. Can the Degree be legally revoked for an action way past the time of award of the degree? How is his present action connected with his academic result of the past? Perhaps expulsion of the student for a period would have been the correct punishment.

It makes my head bow in shame when I see that a decision of Syndicate members, who are all very responsible persons of the country, by which a student of Dhaka University will lose his Degree Certificate for which he studied for over 18 years, and which will deprive a boy, who has reached upto Masters class in the university, his livelihood, was taken by them without considering the far reaching consequences on the boy and his future and his family.

I am not sure what sort of background Anwar Ali has, but if he is poor, I feel sorry, as he will not have the means to seek legal remedy at the court and suffer for the rest of his life for a decision of the University which was way beyond justice.

Sir, why do you not send one of your ace reporters to the university to do an investigative reporting so that your readers can read both sides of the story.

Narme Ali
Motijheel, Dhaka