

Long Live Nur Hussain

On November 10, 1990 Nur Hussain was killed at point blank range by police. He was one among tens of thousands that were out on the streets to denounce the autocratic regime of Hussein Mohammad Ershad. The death of the person of Nur Hussain was real enough, but that one death gave birth to an undying man symbolising the supremacy of man and liberty. So often a historic moment makes an immortal man. On November 10 it was more than the other way round. Nur Hussain immortalised the moment — a moment that grew inexorably into a power of divine majesty that at once annihilated autocracy and set alight an ever burning beacon, guiding the spirit of man towards a goal of common weal and unblemished liberty. How did he work that magic? The daubings on his bare torso — *Shoitoranto Nipat Jaak*, *Gonotanto Mukti Paak* — now become a most celebrated household credo — invited the inevitable bullet. And he literally courted that fatal piece of coursing lead.

Hardly a month passed before autocracy toppled — largely through the pace of movement inspired by that glorious martyrdom of Nur Hussain. And in its wake, thanks to caretaker President Shahabuddin, came the first truly fair and democratic elections giving birth to a genuinely democratically elected government in Bangladesh. How are we faring on the course lighted up by Nur Hussain's sacrifice? The answer, unfortunately, cannot be an enthusiastic affirmation of our abidance by the values coveted by Shaheed Nur Hussain. For we are decidedly in a twilight zone with the worst of sociopolitical premonitions taking shape on the one side and our age-old ideals of liberty and equality beckoning us on the other. Much depends on the government and the party it represents and also no less on the opposition as to what way the nation would take leading to what destiny. And then there are the social and cultural forces and realities forcing and influencing the parties' choices and compulsions.

The outcome of the interaction so far of the three hasn't been happy. The government, never tiring of taking the plea of its being agreed validated and sanctioned, is not mindful of acting to keep that sanction alive. It has agreed to accept the parliamentary system and is contributing to the ineffectiveness of the Parliament. And the opposition amounts to only a defeated force, out unpatriotically to wreak the nation in the ruling party's warped and patently undemocratic idea of politics. The opposition in their turn of contributing to the undoing of democracy is crying hoarse about the government already having forfeited its moral right to rule — much before the nation's mandate for such has come to an end.

No amount of such insubstantial shadow-boxing can serve the cause of democracy. Consolidation of the victory of democracy carved in bloody letters on December 6, 1990 required a broader vision and principled dedication and application on the part of our leaders and their parties. Any expression of such will is still to be seen any where around our national reality. Any bad performance on this count of building democracy — not only of the political kind but of the varieties that would embrace every aspect of our collective life — would be made good by a certain fall for the ways of autocracy from which our habits have hardly been weaned away.

Talking of an undying remembrance of Nur Hussain will be an unmeaning exercise in hollow rhetoric if in practice we fail to uphold the spirit of liberty and sacrifice, tolerance and accommodation. A dent in the so far unsure vessel of democracy is tantamount to a nail into the body of Nur Hussain. We the beneficiaries of his heroism, cannot ever let him down.

Repairing the City Roads

The Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation, Mirza Abbas, has instructed the concerned authorities to repair all city roads by December 15. We welcome this very decisive directive by the Mayor. We also commend him for putting a deadline for the completion of the work. Following every rainy season the city roads become literally unusable. The incessant rain coupled with the heavy pressure of vehicular traffic destroy the road surface, most of which develop huge pot-holes and broken surface. By the time the rains end, we are generally back to square one. The City Corporation each year has to spend large amount of money to get the roads back to the normal state.

The Mayor raised a very pertinent issue when he warned the engineers and area officials of being responsible if the repaired roads do not last, at least, for a period of five years. Literally crores of Taka are wasted every year on road repair, whereas quality work should last us for at least the period mentioned by the Mayor. So the question is what ails our road repair work, that does not make it last the expected period? There is an obvious hint — not very subtle — of corruption in the Mayor's warning. The question we want to raise is, if there is corruption, then will it disappear, or even reduce, just by a mere warning? We are fully aware of the extent and spread of corruption in many of our institutions. We are also aware that the corrupt practices have developed their own vested group, support mechanism and a beneficiary chain willing to go to any length to maintain its grip on the way things are done now.

Therefore, while we support our Mayor for his initiative, we urge him to move in a more serious and organised manner against the corrupt elements in the DCC. If roads are to be repaired with quality material and in a way that will ensure their durability, then the whole process — from selecting contractors, purchasing material and supervising the work done — will have to be thoroughly examined.

Perhaps the Mayor may not be in a position to open the Pandora's box as a whole but, without making some sort of reform, he will not get the type of result he is hoping for.

New Order for South Asia — a Bangladesh Perspective

by Dr Kamal Hossain

THE post-colonial state as it emerged at the advent of independence was cast in the mould of a liberal democracy. A democratic political system was meant to bring about a just society. That this expectation began to be belied, in the early years of independence even in India, is well brought out in Pandit Nehru's reply to Andre Malraux, in an interview in the last year of his life. In answering Malraux's question: (1) "What has been your greatest difficulty since independence?", his answer was: "Creating a just state by just means... perhaps creating a secular state in a religious country...". Thirty years later, these words have a strangely contemporary ring and could apply to most of our societies.

The pledges of independence remain unfulfilled for the overwhelming majority of our peoples. The 1993 UNDP Human Development Report in its ranking of 173 members of the United Nations, according to its Human Development Index, ranks the members of SAARC as follows: Sri Lanka (No. 86) Maldives (No. 112) Pakistan (No. 132), India (No. 134) Bangladesh (No. 147) Nepal (No. 152) and Bhutan (No. 159).

This is why as we take stock and look ahead towards twenty-first century it is important to re-state the basic goal of establishing a just society in which people would live in freedom and with dignity enjoying their basic human rights: civil and political, economic, social and cultural. This is formally recognised in constitutional documents. It is explicitly subscribed to by those who may be described as the enlightened elite and implicitly by the overwhelming majority of our people. The challenging question that we have to confront is what are the impediments which stand in the way of the realisation of this goal?

The first impediment is the role of the predatory elite in our societies. This powerful coalition has demonstrated remarkable ability to impede the consolidation of a consensus behind a shared strategy of political, social and economic development which would carry our society forward towards this

goal. The predatory elite has resources and skills which enable it to manipulate and indeed dominate the political system to their advantage and thus to frustrate the aspirations of majorities.

The second is the character of the post-colonial state which, instead of evolving as an efficient instrument for realising the goals and priorities of the majority, has developed into a centralised, bureaucratically controlled, inefficient and corrupt machinery which is chronically unresponsive to the people's priorities and needs.

If, therefore, we are to begin to devise a strategy which would carry forward our societies towards our shared goals we must attach importance to building and sustaining a truly democratic political system. Here it is important to underline that a democratic political system must not be taken to be

democracy and presents the most formidable impediment to the emergence of a just and stable society.

Effective strategies to reduce and ultimately eliminate violence, assume critical importance. Equally the use of force by the state against its citizens and in inter-state relations must be scrupulously eschewed. The starting point would be a recognition of non-violence as a governing principle for relations between citizens and nations. In order to implement this principle, the normative framework both at the international plane and that which is embodied in our constitutions must be made operational. Impartial and effective law enforcement and the elimination of double standards must be ensured when police functions are performed at the

of the values of tolerance and respect for rights of others, and for the core values of democracy alone can give depth to democracy.

Equally important would be strategies for accelerated implementation of human rights, political and civil rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Judicial activism would enable to the higher judiciary to play a more active role, a creative role, in the area of promoting realisation of social, economic and cultural rights.

There is need for new institutions and initiatives. Institutions such as human rights commissions, if they are truly independent and do not derogate from the role of the judiciary, the institution of the Ombudsman, and a pro-active role by civic and professional organisations as well as non-

post colonial state. A recent report on Empowerment of Women in South Asia urges that:

"The process of empowerment should also generate new notions of power itself, and the purpose for which it is wielded. Present-day notions of power — evolved in a hierarchical, male-dominated society — are based on divisive, destructive and oppressive values which encourage aggression, competition, and corruption, regardless of whether it is men or women wielding power. The need is for a new understanding of power itself — not one of control and exploitation for personal gain, but the power of sharing, giving, creating, and developing the potential of every human being."

The new politics which is needed to sustain political, economic and social development must aim to replace violence by a scrupulous adherence to the

heard, and no doubt this year a few more will chime in. But a few is not enough. What is missing is the political consensus that these issues demand the world's undivided attention if we are to leave our children an earth that will support them."

The principles on which a truly participatory democratic system and a new politics could be built may be derived from a Declaration on People's Participation and Sustainable Development which was adopted some years ago in Manila.

These principles underlined the need for active participation by people if democracy is to deliver. Active interaction is needed among peoples of each of our societies so that we can devise new strategies, institutions and initiatives so that the post-colonial state can be re-structured and that a new politics — of the people, by the people and for the people — in its truest sense can be generated as a vehicle for people's power. There is much to learn from exchanging our experience in this region and by building a coalition of peoples across boundaries since ultimately it is only by our people becoming empowered and regaining control over their destinies that our shared goals can be realised.

The launching of a newspaper which is simultaneously circulated in each of the countries of South Asia should be seriously considered. Can we not resolve to establish a SAARC People's Forum which would assemble immediately before each SAARC summit? Such a Forum composed of representatives of all forms of peoples' organisations — political, civic and professional and other non-governmental organisations — would promote constructive dialogues, exchange of experience and contribute towards building consensus within the region on the new order in South Asia based upon a recognition of the peoples' priorities and the challenges of the 21st century which we need to face together.

The author is the President of Gono Forum. This is an extract from his address to the Third South Asian Regional Dialogue held in Lahore, Pakistan.

Politics must be re-generated so that it is once again the means for mobilising people, making them aware of their rights and social responsibilities, thus becoming a vehicle through which people's power can realise the people's goals. Politics has degenerated in our sub-continent.

one which simply displays the formal trappings of democracy. We have all shared the anguish of being witnesses to the destruction of democracy by authoritarian intervention and also to democracies being undermined from within — by becoming hostages to black money and arms — by imposition of emergencies under cover of which human rights have been brutally suppressed and by the rousing of communal and ethnic sentiments driving communities to outbursts of frenzied violence.

The new order in South Asia must ensure that violence both by the state and by non-state actors is uncompromisingly subordinated to the rule of law. Respect for law and observance of rules has undergone a perceptible erosion in the post independence period in most of our societies. This combined with the role of the predatory elites has seen emergence of mafia-type mercenaries maintained by them and used without any scruples to protect their special interests. These pathological developments have escalated the levels of violence in our societies which threatens

international or national level. In particular, national police and internal security forces must be de-brutalised: they must function as the protectors and not as the violators of the human rights of citizens.

The new political order that has to be built is one in which the people are truly empowered. This empowerment requires nurturing and strengthening of civil society, which in turn must involve harnessing the energies of people, through their active participation in both governmental and non-governmental bodies. The state must be radically re-structured so that it is not an instrument in the hands of self-serving and corrupt politicians and bureaucrats.

Decentralisation and strengthening of local government institutions must be an integral part of the strategy. Conscious citizens must exercise vigilance, articulate their priorities, monitor the activities of those who exercise governmental powers, and ensure that the checks and balances written into constitution function as more than paper safeguards. Human rights activism and popular mobilisation in support

governmental entities, could significantly contribute towards the implementation of human rights.

Politics must be re-generated so that it is once again the means for mobilising people, making them aware of their rights and social responsibilities, thus becoming a vehicle through which people's power can realise the people's goals. Politics has degenerated in our sub-continent. There is little doubt that the politics of those who led us in our early years of independence has undergone a process of degeneration. Today what we see is a kind of cartellisation of politics, in alliance with the predatory elite.

The re-structuring of the state and re-generation of politics must proceed together. Politicians and bureaucrats must accept the discipline of transparency and accountability. It is the weakening and in some cases the absence of these elements that has led to new depths of corruption being attained and in the cynical and sustained violation of the rights of ordinary people. The abuse of power for self-seeking ends lies at the root of the crisis of the

rule of law and confrontation by consensus. As urged in the recent report of the Club of Rome:

"In face of the gravity of the decisions that will have to be taken in the near future, artificially stimulated party rivalries, generated by attempts to win popular votes at the next election and often not even based on real ideological differences, could lead to disaster. There is an overwhelming need to establish the maximum of common agreement between political parties claiming to be custodians of the national good, if we are to weather the many storms ahead."

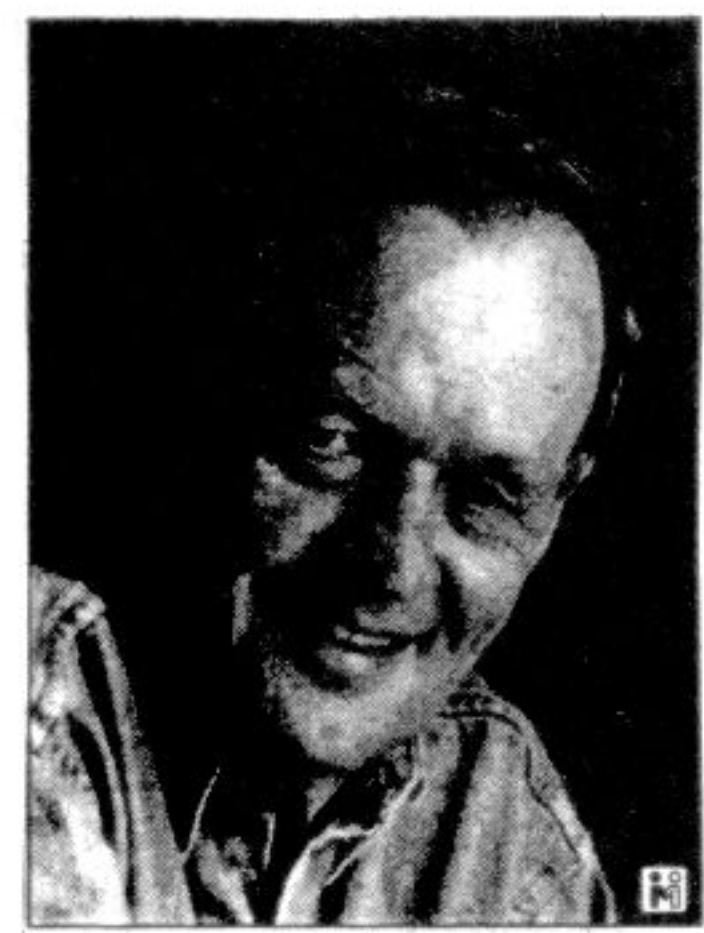
A similar conclusion is arrived at by a report reviewing the Brundtland Report on the need for the politics of consensus, thus:

"The pain of sustainable development — for farmers and city-dwellers, for rich nations and poor — could be eased by political leaders with vision, leaders who see beyond elections tomorrow or the day after to the legacy they would leave for their children by helping us face up to hard choices. A few of these individuals are now being

Canada's New PM Faces Separatist Challenge

Clyde Sanger writes from Ottawa

Jean Chretien is Canada's new Prime Minister. Although born in Quebec he is reviled in the French-speaking province for his opposition to the province's desire for a special status, if not separation, from Canada. Gemini News Service profiles the leader whose challenge is to hold the country together in a drastically changed political landscape where the former ruling party has been virtually wiped out and regional movements are gaining ground.



JEAN CHRETIEN 'I want this country to survive'

in a small Quebec town. His father was a machinist at the town's paper mill. His mother had 19 children, of whom 10 died as infants. He was the eighteenth child.

He studied law at Laval University, a few years ahead of Mulroney. He married his high school sweetheart Aline, and at the age of 29 came to Ottawa as an MP who spoke hardly any English. He liked the hometown

image of "the little guy from Shawinigan." His strong French accent is still one of his most distinguishing characteristics.

He gained respect in English Canada as a sincere and straight speaking Indian Affairs Minister. Even when pushing unpopular federal oil policies in western Canada as Energy Minister, he was personally welcomed in Alberta. Indeed, he can claim much of the credit in this election for the strong Liberal gains in western Canada.

He is also a familiar name abroad, after being Finance Minister and, more briefly, Minister of External Affairs. Queen Elizabeth is said to have spotted him at a Buckingham Palace reception and remarked, "What, you again?"

One friendly critic, Robert Mason Lee, has written of Chretien that he "has long made strength of reducing the complex to the simple, and of bringing extremes into the comfortable middle ground where his instincts reside." Some take this as shallow thinking. His supporters say, however, while not an intellec-

tual, Chretien is quick to learn and to make decisions.

With most Canadians he has high marks for integrity. When he came second to John Turner in the race to succeed Pierre Trudeau as prime minister in 1984, the party president Iona Campagnolo remarked consolingly that he was "first in our heart." Soon afterwards his autobiography called Straight from the Heart became a best-seller.

He left politics in 1986 for a lucrative job in a Toronto law firm, and returned four years later to win the Liberal leadership when John Turner resigned. Journalists asked him why he had come back to politics in 1990 from the easier life of a law practice. He replied simply: "I want this country to survive."

Apart from economic problems and threats to Canada's well-established social welfare system by its deepening national debt, the biggest challenge for Canada comes from Quebec separatists who want to separate their province of seven million people from the other 20 million Canadians. They have shown their strength

in the number of seats won by the Bloc Quebecois, ironically making them the official opposition.

They remember that, as federal Justice Minister, he campaigned vigorously in 1980 to defeat the Quebec referendum on sovereignty-association, and then was central to the negotiations under Trudeau that produced a new constitution without the approval of the Quebec premier Rene Levesque.

He is also reviled in the French-speaking province of Quebec for not having fully supported in 1990 the Meech Lake Accord which would have given the province special status within Canada.

After winning party leadership in 1990 he could not find in Quebec a safe seat by which he could re-enter Parliament, and had to turn to voters in neighbouring New Brunswick. In this election he returned to contest his constituency of Saint Maurice and easily won back his home-town seat back.

Now, as Prime Minister, Jean Chretien will have to struggle to contain the newly-formed

Reform Party which won 52 seats in its first election as a federal party. While Reformers believe overspending is Canada's most serious problem, Chretien argues that the task of creating jobs with state help is just as important as reducing budget deficits.

The battle over Quebec separatism is a more complex and subtle battle.

The separatists seem to have the advantage, and the initiative. A provincial election is due in Quebec in 1994, and the Parti Quebecois (PQ) (allied to the Bloc Quebecois) may well defeat the provincial Liberals who are about to choose a new leader. The PQ is committed to holding within a year a referendum on moving to political sovereignty, and reversing the 1980 referendum's decision to stay with Canada.

Should he let these events unfold, trusting that Quebecers will again vote to stay under Canadian umbrella is those years of economic storms? Or should he try to think up some compromise solution that might satisfy most people in Quebec and in the rest of Canada? Brian Mulroney twice failed in this search.

He will have a stronger team of ministers than Mulroney's cabinet. But Chretien will need all their sophistication, as well as all his own charm and toughness, to find a way ahead.

CLYDE SANGER is director of communications at the North South Institute, an independent economic research group in Ottawa.

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.

The Sword of Tipu Sultan

Sir, It's a pleasant surprise that BTV is showing 'The Sword of Tipu Sultan'. To me, it is a fine show of blossom in the garden. Although this 62-episode serial has been dubbed in Bengali from Urdu, it has not lost its charms totally. It was necessary to dub it in local language so that the majority of the fans including women and children might understand and enjoy each and every dialogue.

I would like to add that Urdu is the unrecognised 'language' of the biggest film industry of the world which is called 'Bollywood' or Bombay. Except Hindu mythological films, no other film on any theme can be a box office hit unless it is not made in Urdu language, with songs and ghazals written by high ranking poets and lyricists. If such films are certified as Hindi films, it doesn't make

much of a difference. After all, what is in a name; as once exclaimed by Shakespeare. Those who have shown their liking to watch 'The Sword of Tipu Sultan' in its original language may satisfy their desire easily by purchasing VCR. They shall find thousands of cassettes of Urdu/Hindi films even in the smallest towns and their suburbs.

KR Zakhmi Khulna

Trade diplomacy

Sir, I am an avid reader of your esteemed daily. Of late I have gone through the news item on 'Economic Diplomacy' as enunciated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister in her London summit with the ambassadors of Bangladesh stationed in Europe. Whether such a diplomacy will succeed or whether way is a debatable question.

Former autocrat Ershad began to man the trade wings with amateurs. Posts created under

orders from Shaheed Zia for trade cadre were withdrawn from the cadre on the pretext that the cadre was yet to be fully equipped with adequate officers. Though it was a temporary step, taken in 1985, it is still continuing.

I am of the view that if the clarion call of our Hon'ble Prime Minister is to materialise then the farsightedness of Late Shaheed Zia should be put to course again. Otherwise the call for 'Trade Diplomacy' may turn into a cry in the wilderness.

One who knows

Newspaper library

Sir, Neither do we have a newspaper library in the metropolitan capital city of Dhaka nor in the whole of the country.

The number of dailies, Bangla and English, published from Dhaka and also from different places of our country has increased manifold but how many of us can purchase or go through those newspapers daily? Similarly how many of us can afford moving from one foreign embassy to another for reading newspapers of their respective countries?

We need a newspaper library

in Dhaka wherein not only all the dailies published from Dhaka and from different areas of our country should be maintained but it would also keep English dailies published from London, New York, Tokyo, Moscow, New Delhi, Karachi, Bangkok, Sydney etc, etc.

The importance of establishment of a newspaper library in Dhaka for the members of public in general and the students in particular cannot be overemphasised.

We request the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Welfare to kindly coordinate and help set up the much needed newspaper library. We are confident that not only the members of the public would contribute to the government financially and materially but the foreign embassies in Dhaka would also help us considerably in this noble task.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

S M Ali

Sir, My words are inadequate to express my feeling about the sudden demise of the founder-editor of The Daily Star. I regret my inability to express my tributes to late S M

Ali befittingly.

I had rare chance to work indirectly with him when he was editor of the Bangladesh Observer as court correspondent and again in The Daily Star as Supreme Court correspondent. I resigned due to my personal difficulty. But I continued to subscribe to the paper as a casual letter writer.

I consider myself as a liberal democrat and a citizen of Bangladesh. I think the journalist community in particular and the nation in general have lost a valiant fighter for liberal democracy. During this short span of the part of his career as editor of the Bangladesh Observer and founder-editor of The Daily Star he himself became an example of honest journalist. Any journalist would pay true tribute to S M Ali if only he/she followed his standard of journalism.

My condolences to all his colleagues who had the opportunity to work with him in any capacity and to all in the Star family on the sad demise of their friendly editor. May Allah rest his soul in peace.

M Saleem Ullah 77, Motiheel C/A, Dhaka.