Dhaka, Wednesday, May 25, 1994

### An Epochal Death

Mohammad Nasiruddin died on Saturday at an age by which our compatriots die more than two times over - and yet there was perhaps not one that did not take the news with shock and a goodly sized unbelief. We had for about full three generations got so used to having him around, almost hovering on our collective existence as some guardian angel. What a kindly cushion was he for our cracked solves sundered through an unremitting process of social fragmentation in the name of religion and community, ideology and politics, personal and group interest, intolerance and aggrandizement of all kinds.

Mohammad Nasiruddin had never in his 106year life had a spell of withdrawing himself, after the ways of a recluse or a hermit, from society. He was immersed up to his ears in affaires social from the day in 1910 he reached Calcutta - an orphaned young man out to strike up a living. In another ten years he was to launch his life's magnum opus, the Saogat, which he couldn't have dared unless he was particularly successful socially. Yet, there lay the magic named Nasiruddin, he steered clear of all groupings and bickerings and raised himself very visibly indeed above even the all-pervasive communal divide.

Saogat was very decidedly and quite understandably more than an organ - almost an instrument which the burgeoning Bengali Muslim intelligentsia would use to come into its own and yet Saogat was so unsectarian and forwardlooking, free from all received prejudices of the time and modern that both Rabindranath and Nazrul wrote for the literary journal with a will. Nazrul was a sworn enemy of communalism and getting him as a contributor was the best certificate for Saogat's graduation into a quality literary periodical rather than a Muslim writers' promotional magazine serving group interest. How did Nasiruddin do it?

It is his power of being involved in society and yet not be eaten up by its primordially annual and blind slitherings that was signified by the classical sub-continental concept of the paramhansa the swan that moves about in murk and is yet not defiled: Nasiruddin was a veritable paramhansa the only that we had in our midst.

There is a clear division among our writers and intellectuals, persisting naggingly ever since the partition of Bengal and the inception of Pakistan. A division based on the point of secularism and nationalism — of emphasising religious communal identity over the historical-cultural-anthropological identity or the perception of Bangaliness, and vice versa. After half a century of jousting, it is clear there will not be any conclusive outcome in the shape of win or loss for either. And intolerance is the fuel that keeps the fight on. It was only Nasiruddin who could talk to both as one of their very own. And what was it that he told them? — things they liked to hear? No. He said the same things - stressing with all his life the eternal verities of society, human life and creative literature. Democracy and tolerance, truth and beauty, fairness and accommodation - such were the values he espoused from the very beginning of his public life as an editor 76 years back, without cringing from any of these for even a moment.

It is an epoch that ends with him. In him a century goes out never to come back. To sum up his life is to sum up the positive striving of a whole century — by a very disadvantaged people known as the Bengali Muslim. In our socio-cultural milieu, Mohammad Nasiruddin will ever remain to be the guiding light for us.

### Not Only a Rebel

He was our Rebel Poet. Most of us feel happy to describe him so. This is not because Kazi Nazrul Islam had his marks less prominent in other pursuits of enduring creativity. On the contrary, his intense passion, zest for life and incorrigibly embedded romanticism and unbounded love for mankind - specially the down-trodden of them gave his poetry a versatility and spontaneity only rarely encountered in world literature. Walt Whitman is perhaps his perfect match but then again his rage and rebellion are what stand out for their abundance. Whether such excessive exuberances have marred the poetic quality is however a different issue.

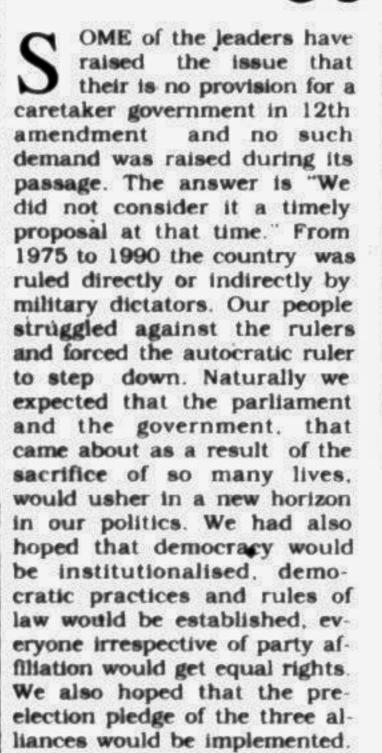
On the birth anniversary of Nazrul, therefore, the temptation to project the poet partially or to give him a trade mark is not going to be easy to resist. But the poet who refused to be branded as anything that compartmentalises or confines the soul — be it in terms of faith or social class — is wrongly labelled to suit our purposes. A poet who rose from a humble origin to fame has demonstrated throughout his active life mental resources that defy any singular definition. In fact, his is a life down to earth and yet one that is more fascinating because of its many-splendoured fruition.

The most prized quality in Nazrul is that he has always been close to his people. There has been an understanding and communication between him and his readers on the same level his interpersonal relations were with people he came across. His colourful life beginning with a singer of a village choir group to the active participation in the Second World War to the resplendent unfolding of creative faculty before culminating in mental disorder, stores so many surprises for us but yet does not distance him from our own experiences.

In today's Bangladesh, Nazrul is even more relevant not because he is a rebel personified but because he represents all that makes every bit of a man as wholesome as is humanly possible. His was a decolonising influence — not in the conventional sense of the term — as great as his cultural expanses. It is not at all surprising that Nazrul traversed between the Islami religious songs - of which he is a pioneer - and Hindu devotional mystic songs with remarkable ease. In reality Nazrul's life, beliefs and mental dispositions transcended across the frontiers to bring about a happy cultural marriage. His was a humanism that made us all rise above our sectarian and compartmentalised worlds. Let Nazrul live in us all, and help to make us bigger than we are today.

## The Daily Star Public Debate

# The Proposition is: Should the Next General Elections be Held under a Caretaker Government?



much their desire and wishes are reflected in the activities of this government. Before elaborating on the caretaker issues. I would like to refute some of the points of

BNP's ministers who took

their position against the

The people now know how

proposition in this debate. Commenting on the need for a caretaker government for conducting general elections, Minister Huda said that " the election commission was a stooge in the hand of Ershad and any election under Ershad could not reflect the verdict of the people. So there was a need for caretaker government to run the election."

A similar situation is prevailing now in the country. Therefore we demand election under an independent caretaker government. Why is the ruling party afraid of a caretaker government for a brief period during election?

Mr Huda termed the idea of a caretake government as "absurd", because in such a situation, there would be a need. according to him, "for a caretaker government, to hold byelections."

We did not say that by-elections would also be held under caretaker government. The question of by-elections has been raised to divert attention from the main issue. Mr Huda also said that a

crisis would be created in choosing the head of the care taker government. to say that we reached a con-

In this context I would like sensus and nominated Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as chief of interim government in 1991. In future we would be able to find out such a man through a

Minister Rafiqul Islam Miah



said that "if there was a national government like South Africa following the liberation war, then sad incident of August 15 could not have taken place."

The political parties in

Sajeda Chowdhury MP, Member of Presidium and Secretary, Parliamentary Party of Bangladesh Awami League, argues in favour of holding the next general election under a neutral and independent caretaker government.

Interviewed by Asiuzzaman

election.

We do not consider a caretaker government to be an alternative to the elected government. The government will resign before the election, to enable a caretaker body to run the election.

Mr Salam • Talukder also said that " the government does not conduct the election. rather an independent Election Commission conducts it."

We know that the Election Commission conducts the

ments in favour of why we want a caretaker govern-

1) This government failed to implement the joint declaration of three alliances of 1990 and repeatedly ignored our demands in parliament on the issue. The special parliamentary committee failed to probe into the alleged corruption of the irrigation ministry

and of the minister concerned 2) The four point agreement signed between the rul-

the ruling party candidate does not win in the by-election. She also said that she wants that seat.

The Prime Minister and her cabinet members violated the election rules by using government transport, announcing aid pledges and transferring the local officials ahead of the election. They released some convicts from jail and used them for rigging in different polling centres.

Under a situation where the

ruling party never cooperates

with the opposition, and it has

no faith and respect for the

opposition parties, a fair elec-

tion is not possible. The ruling

party implicated opposition

leaders in fabricated cases and

oppressed them under differ-

ent means and in such a situa-

tion a fair election is not pos-

sible without a caretaker gov-

ernment.

its foreign missions not to cooperate with the opposition leader during her visit to foreign countries, when the opposition is dubbed the "alternative government." The ruling party leader also

The government instructs

raised the question of local level election, although they knew it very well that the local government election is held on a non-party basis. And for parliamentary by-election, a special parliamentary committee can supervise the by-election instead of a caretaker government. Such a committee was formed before Magura byelection which failed to work because of ruling party's noncooperation.

. The constitution can be amended to introduce the provision of the caretaker government and if the ruling party tables a Bill in this regard, the opposition would extend its support.

And we want next several elections under caretaker government so that a democratic culture, a democratic practice is established in the country.

I think the ruling party is afraid in facing elections under a caretaker government as it lost its popularity for practicing undemocratic activities during the past three and half

Tomorrow, Saifur Rahman, Minister for Finance and Member, Standing Committee, BNP argues against the proposition.

Immediately after the pre-election television speech of Sheikh Hasina in 1991, rumour spread upto the remote village level that AL might lose the election because of Hasina's TV speech. What a powerful network was used to spread the rumour, a politically conscious person can easily guess. If we analyse the 1991 election result, we see that the AL failed to win any seat in some particular areas, and without a few exceptions, most of the central leaders failed to win the election. It was because of a blueprint of an invisible power that the AL could not come to power even after securing more votes than the ruling party could.

South Africa adapted a new election but the fact is that the ing party and the opposition is constitution in which they government controls the ad- not yet implemented. agreed that the parties which would secure 5 per cent votes, would be taken in the government. But the perspective in Bangladesh was completely different. Here the AL got 95 to 99 per cent seats in national and provincial assembly during the election of 1970 and a number of opposition leaders stayed back in Pakistan. There was no sufficient opposition members available who could have been inducted in government.

Mr Rafiq also said that "the appointment of Justice Shahabuddin was constitutional under presidential form of government but there is no scope for a caretaker government under parliamentary form of government. Moreover, the concept of caretaker government is contradictory to democracy and constitution.'

In this context I would like to say that the Constitution is for the people but the people are not for the Constitution. So if it is necessary for the sake of people, the Constitution should be amended to insert the provision of a caretaker government.

BNP's secretary general Abdus Salam Talukder said that BNP formed the government following a free and fair election in 1991 and it would be a dishonour to people's mandate if a caretaker government is formed to replace the elected one. It may be noted that opposition parties together secured nearly 67 per cent of the vote cast in the last

ministration and the administrative organs and as such in-

fluences the election. Mr Talukder also said that AL's Chairperson alleged 'subtle rigging' following BNP's win in 1991 through a free and fair election.

I would like to mention an important point, so that it would be clear that the allegation was not unfounded.

immediately after the preelection television speech of Sheikh Hasina in 1991, rumour spread upto the remote village level that AL might lose the election because of Hasina's TV speech. What a powerful network was used to spread the rumour, a politically conscious person can easily guess. If we analyse the 1991 election result, we see that the AL failed to win any seat in some particular areas, and without a few exceptions, most of the central leaders failed to win the election. It was because of a blueprint of an invisible power that the AL could not come to power even after securing more votes than

the ruling party could. Moreover, minority voters were dropped from the list and fake voters were enlisted in many cities and towns ahead of the election. I personally, submitted a list of 10,000 voters of a Dhaka constituency, but the authorities ignored my

We are now alert about any such conspiracy and will resist such attempts in the future with the help of the people.

Following are my argu-

3) The BNP government sent the Indemnity Ordinance Repeal Bill to cold storage. 4) instead of repealing the

Special Powers Act, the ruling BNP enacted the Anti-terrorism Law to suppress the opposition parties. 5) Fair elections are not

possible under this government because it has politicised the administration which play a vital role in an election pro-

Election Commission cannot act independently because of interference of the government.

7) The voters could not turn up during the Bhola byelection because of hooliganism by the ruling party supporters.

8) The result of the Mirpur by-election was changed because of government interference. The ruling party candidate was declared winner before the election commission announced the result.

9) The authorities tried to change the election result of Dhaka and Chittagong mayoral polls by delaying the counting and announcing the results. The result of Rajshahi and Khulna was announced on the same day of the polling, why was the announcement in Dhaka and Chittagong delayed. Failing to win the Mayorship in Dhaka, the ruling party terrorists killed six AL leaders and workers at Lalbagh.

10) During Magura by-election the Prime Minister herself announced that the area would remain undeveloped if

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Duly Star debate on the crucial issue of whether or not the next general election should be held under a caretaker government is intended to inform the public as to the various arguments put forward by the proponents and opponents of the issue. It is also intended to give political leaders and our valued readers a forum — The Bully Star — through which to express their views.

So far we have published the arguments of nine leaders from the BNP and AL with Suranjit Sengupta being the only one not belonging to either. We will include leaders from other parties shortly.

Given the tenure of the debate so far, we feel obliged to request our future participants in the debate not to repeat the same arguments that have already been made, and to try to present new ones. In the event there's no new argument to give, the participants should at least try to give different examples from other countries or other situations. There should also be more efforts taken to substantiate what is being said or claimed. Just making a statement does not constitute an argument.

Within a few days we expect to start printing the readers' response to this vital political debate. We have already received a number of them. We urge our readers to send in more of their views immediately so that the public mind becomes known to all. If democracy is the rule by the people, then the people must speak out. So DO NOT HESITATE TO MAKE YOUR VIEWS KNOWN.

# Russia: Arms Industry Fights Back

reduced defence budget for 1994, Russia's arms industry is banking on a surge in exports to ensure its survival. Its new drive to sell

ACED with a drastically

weapons abroad is being handled by a new state company. Rosvooruzhenive, which is just beginning its operations although it was formally established last November.

According to Deputy Premier Alexander Shokhin, the new sales campaign will be aimed at "financially and politically stable states in the Middle East, Latin America and South-east Asia." But he adds that "good prospects are also materialising for military cooperation with China."

Five years ago, Russia had huge arms markets in Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East. But exports have fallen dramatically since then.

Indeed, the number of countries buying Russian arms has fallen from 47 at the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union, to the present 26. And while last year's Russian arms exports of around US\$1.5 billion was a 40 per cent increase from 1992 figures, the amount was still far less than during the Soviet years.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the three state enterprises then involved with arms transfers - Oboroneksport

(Defence Exports), Spetzyneshtekhnika (Special Foreign Technology) and the Main Directorate for Military-Technical Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations — began to compete with each other.

-The result of such infighting, however, was disaster for the whole Russian arms indus-

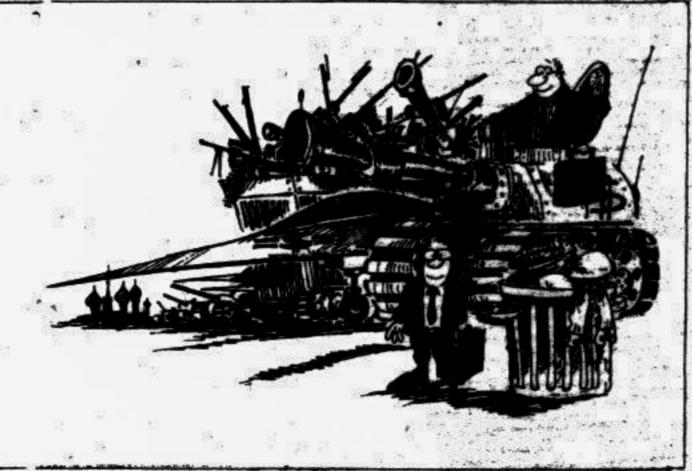
"Arms exports found themselves in a difficult situation because of this competition and foolish liberalisation," says Marshal of Aviation Yevgeni Shaposhnikov, President Boris Yeltsin's personal representative within Rosvooruzheniye. "In addition, the plants

which did gain access to Western markets proved to be commercially incompetent," he explains. "The number of mutually parasitic and competing organisations just multiplied.

The new organisation incorporates all three enterprises. Says Rosvooruzheniye director Lt. Gen. Victor Samoilov: "Over the past two years, attempts to sell arms by many traders failed. It is only a single state structure which can ensure success."

The current drive to boost arms exports actually began

Russia's embattled arms industry looks to exports for survival. Judith Perera and Andrei Ivanov of Inter Press Service report from Moscow.



last year yet with representatives of the Defence Industry Committee visiting 31 countries and holding 186 sales sessions. Leading buyers inn 1993 included Hungary, India China, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Syria and Turkey.

But Russian officials soon realised they had very little experience in selling arms:

Some point out now that the former Soviet Union used to just deliver them to its allies in the past. Officials say the 1993 increase was partly due to Russia's participation in a number of international exhibitions around the world.

The purpose of the new organisation is thus two-fold: to rationalise the arms trade and

to direct most of the profits back to the manufacturers.

Enterprises can still trade directly but final negotiations and the signing of any agreements must be done through the new company. Says Shaposhnikov: "The aim is to regulate the system of militarytechnical cooperation and trade with foreign companies and to restore a sensible form of state monopoly. The profit can then be used to tackle basic economic and social problems - including those of the military-industrial complex."

Rosvooruzheniye will also have the task of encouraging private and state investment in defence enterprises to develop new weapons on a contract ba-

Under the new system, receipts from weapons sales will not go to the state budget. Instead, they will go to the manufacturer after Rosvooruzheniye has taken its three to four per cent commission. The companies will then be taxed on their profits.

With the reorganisation, exports in 1994 are expected to climb to US\$4 billion. But this will not be enough to make up for the drastic cuts in the defence spending. This year's draft budget allocates

billion) for defence purposes. Says First Deputy Defence Minister Andrei Kokoshin: "This means a reduction in actual spending of around 50 per cent on last year." Russian's military industrial

37,100 billion roubles (US\$21

complex is still reeling from the massive cuts instituted in 1992 when the market economy was introduced into the military sector and state orders for weapons were cut by 67 per cent.

And there has not been enough money even to pay for those orders. Last year the budget allocated 7,100 billion roubles (US\$4 billion) for defence while real military spending was much higher. As a result the Defence Ministry owes manufacturers 2,200 bil-

lion roubles (US\$1.24 billion). This is likely to be compounded this year. Moreover, the budget allocates nothing for the 950 military conversion programmes planned for 1994 which are expected to cost at least 4,478 billion roubles US\$2.53 billion).

Kokoshin says this will lead to the closure of 3,000 enterprises which will put four million people out of work and directly affect around 15 million people. He warns that many of Russia's special military cities could become "social emergency zones".

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.

### **Caretaker Govt**

Sir, It's not my purpose to support the ruling or opposition party. Constitutionally next general election is in 1996, two years away. Mayoral election is an eye opener to an independent and autonomous nature of EC headed by a justice above criticism. But the result should not inspire opposition for a gold in Olympic 100 meter sprint.

Ruling party is convinced of its popularity without having to have recourse to Govt. influence or questionable means for its merit and being a lesser evil. It is busy reorganising grassroots levels with fresh committees and resolving factional disputes. By-elections were never influenced by BNP. Extra-ordinary situation like in

Pakistan is non-existent here as of today. Given the opposition's co-operation, moral support, even general election in 96 would not justify a caretaker Govt, opposition leader's proposed blue-print will be a borrowed one from disgrunted political movericks and disenchanted Civil Servant Mushtangs.

Since 1947, India, UK, USA stuck to constitutional obligation. Confused people need modern education and study of "Govt," "Constitution" not from varisity but from New Delhi, London and Boston.

A dual citizen, Gulshan, Dhaka

### "An Unspeakable Crime"

Sir, It seems perversion, dysfunctional behaviour, pathological deviance have become the trivial round of daily life here in this metropolis.

Though I reside on the same floor of Zahurul Haque Hall of Dhaka University learnt of this shocking rape story from a Bangla daily. As the Honours examination is in progress we are too busy to look around. This shameful, tragic, terrific incident must have given a jerk to the "senses" of our "indifferent" authorities. I differ with your opinion (editorial "An Unspeakable Crime" May 9) that some of the "students"

seduced the girl in a single room. We beg the probe authorities not to have a stereoblame on the "students".

Here most students are 'sane' but "voiceless". A vicious circle frequently visits our hall with posh cars and microbuses. Police is usually a passive-onlooker. The 'sane population' is 'subdued' by the tiny band of armed youths who maintain close relation with the "metropolitan vices."

Students in general are not hungry wolves. But in a chaotic situation, with various groups having conflict and contradiction, the deviants have better option. You all know that "they are cadres" and we are "civilians with no stings."

We welcome any girl or boy with the pursuit of knowledge. But we have reservations about the "metropolitan vices" whose attitude diminishes the moral or ethical visions. We beg to restrain the movement of these crime/sex-mongers.

Thanks for your effective editorial which must have stirred the indifferent authorities. We are empathic to the girl's cause. We have no language for consolation. We do have freedom of speech, but with fear of political persecution. My next door neighbour had supreme punishment. My cheerful neighbour was brutally killed in BUET. God knows -"Why?"

Mohammad Masud Chowdhury Zahurul Hague Hall, DU