

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.

Mohammad Nasiruddin had never in his 106-year life had a spell of withdrawing himself, after the ways of a recluse or a hermit, from society.

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 forward-looking, free from all received prejudices of the time and modern that both Rabindranath and Nazrul wrote for the literary journal with a will.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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

SOME of the leaders have raised the issue that there is no provision for a caretaker government in 12th amendment and no such demand was raised during its passage.



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Interviewed by Asiuzzaman

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.

This government failed to implement the joint declaration of three alliances of 1990 and repeatedly ignored our demands in parliament on the issue.

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.

The government instructs its foreign missions not to cooperate with the opposition leader during her visit to foreign countries.

The ruling party leader also 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.

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 years.

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.

South Africa adapted a new constitution in which they agreed that the parties which would secure 5 per cent votes, would be taken in the 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.

Mr Huda also said that a crisis would be created in choosing the head of the caretaker government.

In this context I would like to say that we reached a consensus and nominated Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as chief of interim government in 1991.

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.

election but the fact is that the government controls the administration and the administrative organs and as such influences 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 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.

Moreover, minority voters were dropped from the list and fake voters were enlisted in many cities and towns ahead of the election.

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 arguments in favour of why we want a caretaker government:—

1) This government failed to implement the joint declaration of three alliances of 1990 and repeatedly ignored our demands in parliament on the issue.

2) The four-point agreement signed between the ruling party and the opposition is not yet implemented.

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 process.

6) The Election Commission cannot act independently because of interference of the government.

7) The voters could not turn up during the Bhoia by-election 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.

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

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 election is not possible.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Daily 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.

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.

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.

Russia: Arms Industry Fights Back

(Defence Exports). Spetzvneshtekhnika (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 industry.

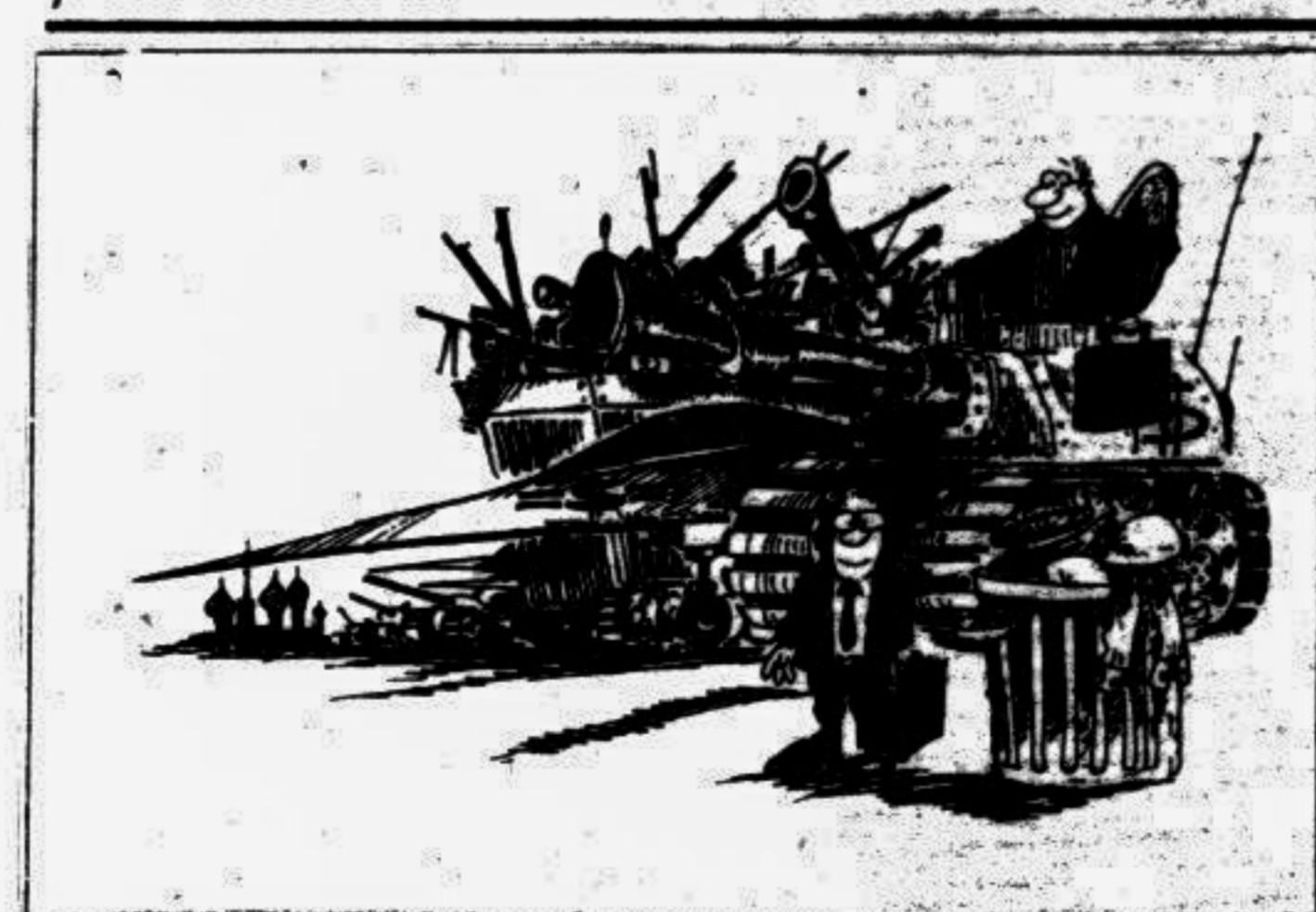
"Arms exports found themselves in a difficult situation because of this competition and foolish liberalisation," says Marshal of Aviation Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, President Boris Yeltsin's personal representative within Rosvooruzheniye.

"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 in 1993 included Hungary, India, China, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Syria and Turkey.

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.

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 military-technical 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 basis.

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

37,100 billion roubles (US\$21 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 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 billion 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".

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.

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 disgruntled political mavericks 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 variety 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 I learnt of this shocking rape story from a Bangla daily. As the Honourable 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 stereotyped blame on the "students".

Here most students are 'sane' but 'voiceless'. A vicious circle frequently visits our hall with push 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 Haque Hall, DU