

Murder Mystery

Apparently the pieces are falling in place on the grisly mother-daughter murder episode in a Lalmaia flat that spoilt the modest breakfast at many homes on Monday morning. With the arrest of house-maid Romena and her confessional statement that she had committed the crime single-handed, the curtain may well have been drawn on the first act of the play called *public curiosity*, but not on all of it. Question remains as to the veracity of Romena's claim that she killed Nilufar Chowdhury and Shoma all by herself — completely unaided. Only further investigations carried out with utmost professional finesse can help us find an answer to this. However, while the murder was sensational there has been subdued kite-flying about it as a redeeming sign of media maturity.

The feelings that the tragedy instantly evoked among us were of trauma, the mental and physiological identification with the pain and groaning of the self-same human bodies, and above all that of vulnerability. It was by no means the first double murder even though quite obviously this happened at a higher social stratum and in an accomplished two-job, and the rest-set-on-course, family.

The police has had a good deal to go on with in this case putting them clearly on track from day one which was a welcome departure from the odd snifflings they had to customarily do into other murder mysteries. The missing maid-servant, her known address, blood-soaked clothes, suspected murder weapons, the finger prints and the information about Romena's occasional altercation with the victims were all very useful clues. And, in the hot pursuit of the house-maid with a dragnet closing in on her at her village hide-out, the police left nothing more to be desired. But thank god, Romena fled home-ward!

Has the chestnut been wholly drawn from the fire? That is the pertinent question at the moment after Romena has been taken into custody. Was she capable of the raw nerve and courage and butcherlike skill that were required to execute Shoma — who bore signs of resistance but none apparently on the self-confessed killer — lie in wait for her mother to arrive, be ushered in and cut up from behind, do the cleaning job and make good her escape with those jewellery all by herself? These are a tall order even for a strongly-built male or two, let alone a single female. Secondly, the murders might have looked like impulsive acts but Romena was mentally conditioned from before to commit these. She could have as well taken a few others into confidence. The finger-prints and perhaps some other forensic material would hopefully solve this puzzle.

The gruesome incident opens our eyes to a few more things. Previously the thumb-rule was to keep the photograph and detailed address of the domestic aid, but it is time now we did some screening on his or her psychological and other antecedents. Simultaneously when a decision is taken to finally part with somebody it better be applied then and there.

On available information, Romena is of temperamental nature and she turned out to be a homicidal maniac in the deadly acts. She gives the impression of being a victim of what a psychologist would call *compulsive obsession*, a syndrome in which a negative or a hostile feeling grows by progression. Some house-keepers may suffer from delusions of authority when looking after homes for hours everyday over a long period of time with virtually none to oversee their work or normally relate to them.

As we condole the deaths and sympathise with the bereaved members of the family hoping that their misfortune will not visit any other family, we cannot help mention a certain insensitivity to distress screaming within a hearing range which was seemingly ignored.

Behind the Price Spurt

Quite a number of items of daily use have registered an abnormal price hike, thanks to plague-related panic which swept the entire length and breadth of the country. This is interesting because essentials in Bangladesh ought to have the remotest connection with plague in Surat, the place of origin, and elsewhere in India. But not quite. For a number of consumer goods the country now has to rely — in some cases almost entirely and in others only partially — on supplies from neighbouring India.

Any disruption in the supply of those items Bangladesh gets from India is bound to destabilise the local market. The ban imposed by the Controller of Import and Export on all food items from India should not as yet affect the market. But our traders are smart enough to take advantage of any such propitious situation for them, although they are not known to be equally prompt to lower the prices of items that glut the market and become cheaper at the farm or production level.

Such a fluid — better say inconsistent — character of our market is not a healthy sign of our economy. It shows that ours is a sellers' market. Paradoxically though the purchasing power of the common man is very low. So what is the message? The message is that the traders always take an undue advantage through market manipulation and the hardest hit are the general consumers.

In this case, the scare of the highly contagious disease that spread in Surat has some genuine psychological basis. There is no question of letting the opportunity go by the traders. Sure enough, the panic has gone to the extent of hypochondria. Not even the World Health Organisation (WHO) has determined the Indian plague so seriously threatening. The world body has accepted the Indian claim that the epidemic is now under control. To add to the good turn of events, an expert on the disease brought in on the World Service of BBC aired the view that the plague does not necessarily travel beyond the frontier i.e., the place of origin and, still better, the disease is time-bound, the duration of its visitation not lasting more than a fortnight.

Clearly, a thorough checking at the entry points of those coming from the plague-hit area would have sufficed along with the good stocks of Tetracycline or Streptomycin. But the situation here is such that people suspect plague germs in anything of foreign origin. This may surely increase the sale of local products but certainly it is a flawed mentality. Admittedly, people have become conscious enough to clear off the rubbish and the rats, but this is being offset by their discarding the garbage carelessly.

Political Party : Deviation from Meaning

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

IRST, let us venture to find out the number of political parties and see what they stand for. If we ask a researcher, an activist or an electoral official, he may not give us any reliable statistics to date. Nor, he can say which one is a political party, which one is not, by drawing a definition from a book of political science or law of the land. A conglomeration of self-seekers cannot be called a political party. The confusing regulations and ordinance have further confounded the political situation and the matter has come to a tragic pass. 'Campus violence', 'upward politicisation', are the outcome.

Article 152 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, states that — 'Political Party' includes a group or combination of persons who operate within or outside parliament under a distinctive name and who hold themselves out for the purpose of propagating a political opinion or engaging in any other political activity.

This definition has a genesis to the history of Bangladesh. The election to first parliament was held on 7 March, 1973. Fourteen political parties contested. Bangladesh Awami League, National Awami Party (Muzaffar), National Awami Party (Bhashani) and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) were very prominent then.

In terms of percentage of votes received, AL got 73.16%, NAP (M) 8.32%, NAP (B) 5.32% and JSD 6.52%.

Noie of the other ten parties could reach the mark of even 0.50%. Bangladesh Awami League has a long political history, since its establishment in 1949 by late Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. Hussain Shahid Suhrarwary and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led this party, after Bhashani severed his link with Awami League on question of autonomy and foreign policy. National Awami Party was formed under the leadership of Maulana Bhashani in July, 1957. With the declaration

of 6-point demand, Awami League, with Sheikh Mujib as president of the organization, in 1966 strode the road towards independence. Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign and independent state in 1971. In October 1972, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal was formed with some lower ranking leaders of Awami League and Rab-e Chhatra League, favouring a scientific socialism. All the parties contesting the election actively participated in the 9-month long bloody struggle of the people.

None of the parties came into being at the behest of any individual. It was the outcome of political struggle. One may disagree with the formation of Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSA), amalgamating Awami League, CPB, NAP and some other small parties, in February, 1975. But, it was a political process with an ideology, not unknown in other countries. It was upto the political leaders how they wanted to resurrect the ravaged land and administration, in the face of the frustration of people, law and order situation and famine in 1974. It was called a second revolution.

Then, came 15th of August, 1975. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman was killed at his residence along with his family members. It effected the change of a democratic government through killing. Subsequent events give rise to suspicion that Khondokar Mostaque and some other Awami League Ministers might have been involved in the plot.

On 7 November 1975 Ziaur Rahman assumed power through a military coup. Martial Law was clamped down and short spell of democratic rule came to an end. It seems, to protect the killers, their accomplices and conspirators, Indemnity Ordinance, 1975, is still in force; which is anti-democratic and against the spirit of the rule of law. Nothing can be more preposterous than a feeling that a

black law and democracy can co-exist.

There is no use in blaming the present for the past and vice versa, and indulge in unnecessary comparative studies, between regimes, which are virtually polemic. At present, a lot of time is misused in seminars, discussions etc. on this score, without any benefit to the society and the future generation. Instead of towing the line of political party, intelligent and university teachers can analyse the current situation and say what is to be done for the betterment of the future. Plainly speaking, our society and politicians are deprived of such advice from them, although we have a rich political heritage. A wrong is to be rectified, not to be justified. This is the universal approach. We are to compare ourselves, at least with neighbouring countries, if not elsewhere with advanced democracies. And in such comparison, why we appear poor, is a point to ponder.

The burning question today is how far the law and practice of front organizations of a political party are compatible with democracy and development. Martial Law Regulation No XXII of 1976 meant a departure from the age-old political culture of our country. It is called political parties regulation, 1976, and paragraph 2 (b) states — 'Political Party' means any association or body of individuals which pursues, or is engaged in, any activity with political purpose including propagation of any political opinion and includes any affiliated, associated or front organization, such as student, labour, cultural, peasant and youth organisation, of such association or body.

Paragraph 14 of MLR further stipulates that Government may, from time to time, by order, regulate the activities, including election campaign, of any political parties.

The number of political parties increased all of a sudden after 1976. Twenty-nine parties

in the Constitution

contested the election in 1979, twenty-eight in 1986. The figure was down to eight in 1988, but within it was the 23-party alliance and combined opposition, containing several parties, in election to the fifth parliament. 1991, seventy-four parties contested including BNP, the ruling party and mainstream opposition: AL, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami.

When we talk to a senior politician (not a former minister or bureaucrat-cum-politician), he laments the low morale and degradation, which is totally contrary to the bright tradition in politics of 50s and 60s. Students did their politics then independently and not as subordinates of a party leader. Campus was peaceful and serene for academic pursuits. Students were friends, not enemies of each other. Of course, they had difference of opinions, but there weren't 'professional' student session jams or outside interference.

To institutionalize democracy, there is no way out but to build the political party in line with our history and constitutional law. There is no denying the fact that student organizations are now directly controlled by the political parties, for which campus has become a hotbed of power struggle, and students have lost control over their own organizations. We are to put a halt to this unconstitutional and undemocratic activity of the parties. If necessary, law may be enacted to free student, labour, cultural, peasant and youth organisations from the clutches of political party, revoking the Political Parties Regulation, 1976. Let the politicians, university and college teachers, and intelligentia unite to establish sanity in politics and restore morality in the interest of our generation and next generations to come.

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Partial Parliamentary Elections in Turkey: Setting Controversy at Rest

by Arshad-uz Zaman

TURKEY is set to go to partial Parliamentary polls on 4 December next to fill 22 vacant seats. By announcing this decision Prime Minister Tansu Ciller has taken the political initiative entirely in her hands.

According to article 78 of the Constitution, if there is one sixth of National Assembly seats vacant, elections must be held within three months. Turkey has 22 vacant seats and one ruling True Path Party (DYP) member had announced his intention to resign, which would bring the total to the required 23 vacant seats. Turkey has been in the midst of a debate for months to hold either partial elections to fill those seats or advance date of 'General Elections', which is normally due towards the end of 1996. By announcing a firm date for partial elections, Ciller has set the controversy at rest.

Of the 22 vacant seats, 14 belong to the banned pro-Kurdish Democrat Party (DEP). whose six parliamentary members are currently facing trial in an Ankara court. The rest are either abroad or dead.

Earlier this year the parliamentary immunity of the DEP members was lifted, the party closed and they are facing trial for treason, which is punishable by death. All the DEP members come from the Kurdish inhabited South Eastern region of Turkey, where Turkey has been fighting for ten years a war against the separatist PKK which has cost more than 11000 lives on both sides.

Of Turkey's 60 million population, nearly 12 million are Kurds. Replying to a question regarding participation by former DEP members currently under trial, Speaker of Parliament Husamettin Cindoruk stated, Turkey is a democratic country and the DEP former members of parliament can be candidates in the partial elections. It is be-

ing confidently predicted here that under trial DEP members will fight elections as candidates of HADEP, newly formed pro-Kurdish party, successor of DEP.

There was countrywide Municipal elections last March and DEP boycotted the polls. The Kurdish votes went mainly to pro-Islamic Welfare Party (RP) of Necmettin Erbakan, who doubled its vote and won in such major cities as Istanbul and Ankara. The Kurdish voters have traditionally voted for their candidates of Socialist People's Party (SHP). In 1991 General Elections DEP entered the parliament as allies of SHP but parted company after SHP failed to meet their demands.

Trial of DEP deputies has put severe strain in relations between Turkey and European Union, whose membership Turkey has been seeking for three decades. In a recent de-

cision the parliamentary committee of European Union recommended to its parent body in Strasbourg to freeze relations with Turkish Parliament until the question of trial of DEP members was settled. Election victory of DEP members will put relations between European Union and Turkey back on the rails. This has become all the more urgent since Turkey is making preparations to enter the Customs Union of European Union in 1995, an essential first step for fulfilling Turkey's ambition to become the first Muslim country in the European Union.

Besides 14 DEP seats, the distribution of the other vacant seats are: ANAP-4, DYP, SHP, RP and CHP-1 each. For ANAP to retain its position as main challenger of DYP, it must attempt to recapture those seats. RP is the rising star and did so

well in the Municipal Elections that they would be expected to repeat the performance. In the light of participation by Kurdish politicians in the South East, the main battlefield for the partial elections, this looks like an impossibility.

It is Murat Karayalcin, President of the SHP, Deputy Prime Minister and coalition partner of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, who faces the toughest test of his political career. He came to his present post following the resignation of Erdal Inonu. Karayalcin will fight for a seat in Parliament. His party has been sliding badly since 1991 elections as votes are splintered among the left leaning parties. Karayalcin has faced continuously sniping from within his own party. Should he fail to win a seat in the coming partial elections, it may doom his political career

OPINION

Computer at the Tertiary Level

AlifZabr

The degree of computing activities at the two universities, DU and JU (Star, Sept 8 Special) makes dismal reading, when there is a lot of interest and talent available at the entry and higher levels for beginners and advanced students wishing either to use a computer at home or at the workplace, or get to the specialist's level for a career.

A considerable number of the younger generation who have the scope for training abroad take up computer courses at the tertiary level of education. Many ranked examinees at the SSC and HSC levels confess at the interviews their desire to go for computer courses.

The interested academic centres need a coordinating mechanism at the national level, for implementation of the state policy (if there is a visible one). Encouragement from the leaders of the society is a must at different stages: before the planning, during periodical reviews, and for perspective planning well into the next century.

The Bangladesh Computer Council is supposed to be a key body to organise the development of the computer atmosphere in the country, and provide the encouragement and push, to lure the younger generation into this modern way of working. The efficiency of work in a developing country can be raised quickly and economically by the use of computers in offices of the government and the private sectors.

Interest in computers cannot be expected from the leaders of the previous generation in this hi-tech field. The younger generation have to move their seniors who hold the keys to policy-making. The societies, in the economically poorer societies, are more traditional, therefore the inertia required for change is much greater.

Since for the Bengalees politics is a pastime the whole of the time, the political leaders have to be roped in to initiate movements for the popularisation of computers. But we have noted during the past decades, this energy is scattered, achieving little.

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I spoke to some business leaders in the computer line: most of them have no time to find out (and then read) what is appearing in the press. Since the development curve is rising, it is sloping, and on a slope it is difficult to take a stable stand. Individual and personal insecurity is not conductive towards national cohesion.

about government's initiative in promoting investments, creation of more jobs and reduction of unemployment, etc. Exporting a few thousand men through 'agents' will not take the country ahead and fulfil the aspirations of a newly emancipated nation. Newspaper report that 'Bangladesh men and women are in jails of foreign countries' being defrauded by scrupulous manpower agents can hardly be a matter of honour.

I wonder if the claim of the Finance Minister that there is a 'boom' in our economy holds any water. To a student of economics some rise in the bank reserve and reduction in inflation would mean nothing short of a kind credit squeeze, if there is no commensurate increase of spending in both public and private sectors.

Furthermore, this will lead to a 'bearish' tendency in the economy which will bring stagnation and immobilize economic activities and our aim of achieving further 'growth' will turn into a myth only.

We have not seen anything concrete if repeated declaration of the Finance Minister's reduction of bank rate has been able to stimulate adequate response.

Is it not regrettable that today almost all our daily necessities are coming from across the border than hither to before?

I am afraid I am digressing, but it was unavoidable. However, to revert back to my discussion about BTV, we see that some of its transmission do not serve any purpose of national importance excepting promoting the interest of a political party, that too, at a great expense from the national exchequer.

I am inclined to agree with many that BTV has deviated from its objectivity and past flare, all the more in the face of the appearance of 'cable TV', which has brought in many en-

joyable programmes by BBC Star TV, Prime Sports and more thrilling programmes by Zee TV and MTV.

I am sure that some of our programme organisers and producers are quite talented, experienced and innovative. Given proper opportunity and encouragement, they will certainly be able to retrieve BTV from its present moribund condition.

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Civilization

Sir, To say that I was appalled when I read Nico den Tuindur's article 'Civilization' in the Daily Star on Oct. 2, 1994, would be an understatement. I do believe that every person has a right to an opinion but no one has the right to make such a sweeping generalization about an entire culture as our dear Dutch friend.

Nico seems to have developed a ridiculously narrow-minded opinion about our society during his stay here. To call 'belching' and 'throat clearing' Bangladeshi habits, as he did in his article, is absolutely reprehensible and just as absurd as suggesting nail-biting is the national pastime in Mozambique! I do not deny, that the habits he mentioned are ubiquitous in Bangladesh, (as in many other parts of the world) but I simply fail to see the connection between Bangladeshi culture and 'belching'.

As Nico himself suggested, he has a handful of traits which we would find curious or unpleasant. He should realize that this is simply because we are unaccustomed to his ways just as he is to ours. It doesn't imply, as he arrogantly suggested, that his ways are more "civilized". I am pretty sure that it would be perfectly clear to him why Bangladeshi gaze at his bare things when he walks in shorts here. It is pre-

cisely because of the same reason why people in Amsterdam look at us when we decide to roam around wearing a panjabi.

I admit that I had never heard of the "renowned" sociologist before I read Nico's article but his definition of the term "refined behaviour" clearly shows he was just as fanatic as our Dutch friend