

## Murder Mystery

Apparently the pieces are falling in place on the grisly mother-daughter murder episode in a Lalmatia 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 sniffings 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

# in the Constitution

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

**F**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', 'unwanted 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%. None 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 Shaheed Suhrawardy 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-led 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 Mujibur 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, intelligentsia 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

party in such manner as it may deem fit.

The effect of this regulation, subsequent amendment and ordinance were apparent in presidential election 1978 and parliament election, 1979. Old parties were splintered and new parties born. For example, after the announcement of party regulation, Awami League was established, with the permission of the Government as Awami League (Malek Ukil), Awami League (Mizan Chowdhury), Awami League (Dewan Farid Gazi), Ziaur Rahman formed National Front — consisting of Jaga Dal, Bhashani NAP (Mashuri), UPP (Kazi Zafar), Bangladesh Muslim League and Tashil Federation to contest the presidential election. General Osmani was nominated from the Democratic Alliance. Zia won. After his election as president, he abolished the front and established BNP on Sept 1, 1978.

The newly formed BNP was composed of persons drawn from different political parties, retired bureaucrats and also newcomers. Hardly the BNP passed six months of its existence, that it won 220 seats in the parliament election of February 18, 1979. Different front organizations of the party in power were in action.

Formation of political party followed the same course after General Ershad assumed power on March 24, 1982. This time 'Jatiya Party' was formed on 1st January, 1986. Front organizations were set up. On the students front, however, they experimented differently. Jatiya Party got 183 seats in 3rd parliament election (1986) and 251 seats in 4th parliament election (1988). This party has the same type of composition, i.e. persons drawn from different political parties, retired bureaucrats and newcomers.

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

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.

More than three and a half years have passed by, since BNP is running the administration of the country. What was expected after mass upsurge, 1990, and election, 1991, was that the political parties would undertake cleansing programme to make their parties appear at par with people's aspiration and sacrifices, instilling ideas in rank and file, and placing right man in the right place. But, this is yet to materialise — to bring the parties in line with our glorious tradition, and at least comparable with those obtaining in our neighbouring countries. In the meantime, Gano Forum, a new political party, came into being in 1993 and, so far did not open front organizations.

As we see, campus violence is still rampant, parliament is in a stalemate, parties are in a position of confrontation and economy is sluggish. During September last, two students of Dhaka University were killed. They could not be termed 'shaheed'. On 1st October, the ruling party held a public meeting at Manik Mia Avenue in Dhaka, which was addressed by BNP chairperson, other party leaders and leaders of its front organizations, i.e. Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, Samik Dal and Krishak Dal. The leaders of the front organizations are MPs. One wonders what purpose such front organizations can serve, except to mobilize people for meetings, muster support for party and, in case of ruling party, government, and in the process, as it

occurs, set in motion a divisive and fighting tendency. More or less some description is applicable in case of other parties. All these are, no doubt, detrimental to peace, progress and democracy. And the cost incurred by a political party in maintaining the fronts and holding meetings etc. can be easily guessed!

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 jam 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 intelligentsia 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

**T**URKEY 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-

lievingly 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 or 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

and trigger instability within the Government for the majority DYP will be compelled to look for a new coalition partner.

Since her emergence on the Turkish political scene barely a year ago as the first lady Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller has faced one election after another. Her last was the Municipal elections in March last, where she performed better than expected. This time it is for the Parliament, the ultimate arbiter of the nation's destiny. DYP, now under President Suleyman Demirel had emerged with largest number of seats in 1991 elections. A good showing in the partial elections will smooth her path to running the country until 1996 and take the wind out of the sails of her principal opponents and RP. — ANAP

## To the Editor...

### BTV and the state of the economy

Sir, It is true that Bangladesh Television started its journey with flying colours. Its various programmes were undoubtedly very enjoyable.

Various features, drama serials, children's programmes and transmission of extracts from foreign programmes were of reasonably high standard. Even the routine transmission of news, reviews of current political events worldwide, group discussion and interviews of important personalities used to be quite interesting and educative. People of our neighbouring countries remained eager to turn on their TV sets to view Bangladeshi TV programmes.

What has happened to the BTV today? The moment you switch on your television you see some dull and monotonous programmes. Being state controlled it has to start with news of some governmental high-ups which may at times include some trifling out-door shootings as well.

These programmes consume most of the transmission time. During the previous regime there was a joke about BTV that it was a publicity instrument for Shaheb, Bibi and Ghulam meaning — husband, wife and servants. On these question BTV had many a times faced gherao. Has there been any qualitative change in the character of the BTV after the present democratic government came to power?

BTV, these days, shows a long list of 'minor works' being carried out here and there. As a matter of fact it starts with that sort of news and it goes on day in and day out in the same fashion.

You sometimes hear about the repair of a school building or a culvert of a village as if there is nothing else to furnish! What is there to repeat these things everyday? The nation would like to hear more

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. It is 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.

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 ap-

palled 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 did in his article.

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 Bangladeshis 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. The correct definition of a refined mind, in my opinion, is the ability to observe and appreciate other cultures without forming a prejudice. Assuming that this definition is correct, Nico is lagging far behind the rest of us. Grow up, Nico! Please.

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### Indian plague and our rivers

Sir, Nature's greatest scourge, the plague has hit Surat, and also Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta and many other places in India. World Health Organisation (WHO) has issued a red alert to its 189 member states for surveillance and checking of disembarking passengers from aircraft or ship coming from or via India.

Like many countries in south-east Asia, Middle East, Europe and SAARC region, Bangladesh has also taken a number of steps to check any outbreak of the deadly epidemic. But the geo-economic situation of our country is quite different from others.

Unfortunately, our government has so far not taken any step for the examination of the contamination of the water which is entering into our country through different upper riparian rivers in India.

We know testing and saving our river waters from contamination is a Herculean task and so we may immediately request the WHO for necessary help and assistance.

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## OPINION

## Computing at the Tertial Level

Alif Zabr

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 in the public and the private sectors.

Newspapers like The Daily Star are doing their bit in popularising the computer by regularly issuing a monthly supplement. The local contribution is poor and disappointing; and the overbearing presence of agencies such as the BCC is missing. There is a lack of enthusiasm in the local PC magazines.

The busy bureaucracy has to lend a helping hand. In addition, the nascent business sector has to contribute to the media their ideas and proposals through seminars and publicity campaigns, in the same way the exporters are basking in the limelight by pressing their demands to the government.

The PC 'movement' is simply not there, as we see in the case of political activities even on flimsy and irrelevant issues (priority-wise). If we calculate the amount of energy used by lakhs of people for political activities at all levels throughout the year (politics is brought in even when it is not needed!), the figure would be staggering. As we have noted during the past decades, this energy is scattered, achieving little.

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 tend to talk and talk, and not compute. The gift of the gab has not taken us anywhere.

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 conducive towards national cohesion.