

Shazneen Murder

We would like to commend the law enforcing authority for its work so far. First the police and then the CID have done a commendable job of the initial investigation. However we would also like to raise a word of caution that they should not become complacent. There will be a natural tendency of a success-starved police to try and wrap up this case as quickly as possible to prove to the nation that they can really act precipitously and catch a murderer and finish a case in record time. This temptation will be all the more prominent in this case because the main culprit has been caught and he has confessed.

The reason for our concern is precisely this. In the euphoria of the initial success some vital clues and unanswered questions may be glossed over and thereby the real extent of the crime and its spread may well remain hidden. This we say as much for justice for the young Shazneen as we say for the hundreds and thousands of Shazneens who may be potential victims of such heinous crimes. The truth is that our society has become crime ridden. The reasons for that are just as varied as they are numerous. From political patronisation of criminals to distortion of the most fundamental values of our life, we have a lot to think about. The point to note here is that in an environment where criminals remain undetected for years, where those who are known to be guilty are seen to go free, where gangsters are publicly courted by the high and mighty, it is natural, almost inevitable, that the criminally inclined will not think twice before committing a crime knowing that the law will never catch up with them.

While we urge the CID and the police to leave no stone unturned to get to the bottom of this gruesome murder, we also urge the civil society at large not to wait for this to happen again before they start a widespread social action to cleanse the society of the malaise that is eating away at the very core. It will be wrong to politicise this event, and we thank all parties for not having done so. But that should not constrain us from public mass action which is the need of the hour to build a massive civic resistance against criminals who appear to have taken over our lives. We urge all civic minded people, social and community organisations, NGOs, women organisations to unitedly raise their voice to protect our women and children from violence. For the government, the opposition and the civic society the time for action is now.

Competition All the Way

World Bank Country Director Pierre Landel-Mills delivered a one-line message at his luncheon meeting with the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Tuesday. He made a host of very cogent points but what stands out of them all is his imploring all concerned to be competitive. A pithy phrase which goes to sum up all that is needed to be done by us to turn a corner.

To be competitive does not merely mean an exchange rate adjustment rendering our exports competitive vis-a-vis those of East and Southeast Asian countries. Although this should be an important ingredient of our salesmanship strategy in the turmoil-ridden financial world of today, there are certain other basic factors that need to be addressed to promote the cause of our economy.

Let's separate the facts from fiction and concentrate on them. We must carefully weigh up where we stand among the whole bunch of investment-seeking countries in terms of project implementation, aid utilisation, handling of FDI proposals and capital market management. We shall be only in a reckoning with them if the power, telecommunications and customs services and port facilities we offer can compare favourably with theirs. The much-touted attractive incentives package does not mean much if such basic services are flawed and wanting. We are also in competition with them in other important parameters, such as, political stability, administrative system, law and order, incidence of rent-seeking and extortion, labour output rate, auditing standards, financial laws and their application.

The saving grace is, it is not the very high standards of the western world that are on demand here. The competition is basically within the developing world. So, the improvements sought are not asking for the impossible.

Death of a Giraffe

So the lone giraffe of Dhaka zoo, in fact the lone member of *Giraffa camelopardalis* in Bangladesh is dead. The African ruminant which died late Monday night was 15; a rather premature age for death of these long necked animals blessed with a life expectancy of 30 years on an average. According to the zoo authorities quoted in a section of the press the camelopard died of liver cirrhosis. True, the animal was long without a peer and away from its natural habitat of the savannahs and the open bush country in the south of Sahara where they move in herds yet it is hard to believe an animal suffering from serious liver complaint can look so good as to give the impression of being 'well and healthy' just before its death. We are not sure if disease hastened the end of the lonely, sad animal or it was the same sinister cycle at work that had poisoned some big cats to death.

The procession of death of the helpless caged animals in the zoo however has underlined two very palpable points. First, the zoo administration has to be bolstered immediately. Because too many deaths have occurred in too short a period of time without anyone being really punished for callousness, if not cruelty. The maintenance of the zoo is really in a shambles. Secondly, if the authorities have any commitment to wild life preservation, they have to move away from this outmoded and cruel notion of zoo to sanctuary. Many countries sharing our socio-economic status and peculiarities have already embraced it. Besides, if we can't provide the animals with at least the semblance of their natural habitat, a degree of freedom and, above all, care springing from genuine love for the animals, it is just not worth bringing them such distances only to put them through the death row.

Gun Battle in DU and Aftermath: Portends Ill Omen for All Concerned

To establish democracy is easier than to sustain it. This is more so in respect of relatively new nations who have become independent after shaking off the yoke of colonialism. In Bangladesh, the dawn of independence witnessed a bright promise for democracy soon to be degenerated into a one-party Baksal rule and then to be ended with a military regime. There was a short spell of democracy only to be terminated with an autocratic rule. After a relentless struggle for nine years, democracy was restored in the country in 1991 and somehow has sustained through 1996 elections. The democratic-minded people of our country has been nurturing their cherished hope that a proper democratic tradition is set up and flourished in our land.

But the road to democracy is not easy to tread on. There are deep pot holes and sharp bends at every nook and corner. In its march, democracy faltered at times, to the chagrin of many. In recent times, these obstacles were encountered from time to time. These took the form of ineffective participation of the opposition in the parliament, severe repression of opposition members and supporters in all possible ways, prevention of holding demonstrations and processions as in the past, forcible private and government measures to obstruct hartals, collusion with police and

The most recent decision of the government to ban simultaneous broadcasting of the proceedings of the parliament and to provide a government resume instead, deprived the nation whatever they could learn about the real situation of the country from opposition legislators, as this could not be manipulated like TV telecasting.

the like. It is needless to elaborate on these areas of Achilles' heel of a healthy, growing democracy. But, for the sake of quick understanding, it may perhaps be worthwhile to make a brief reference of them. BNP legislators have been continuously alleging that they are often being denied their right to speak on vital national issues in the parliament, the Speaker is guilty of partisanship, the television projections are one-sided and so on and so forth. As a result, they walked out of the House many times and even went to the extent of resorting to unruly behaviour, though in the face of immense provocation. There have, indeed, been compromises, only to be violated without much delay. The BNP makes allegations that the Speaker and workers are being put to undue harassment, arrests, killings and even those in police custody. Many are victims of false cases.

Contrary to the past practice, opposition now are not allowed to hold meetings and demonstrations in any place of their choice, and in designated places permission is refused or delayed. Again, the past practice of not holding counter demonstrations on the day of hartal

called by one or more political parties has since been reversed. Now, the ruling party comes out with counter demonstrations and processions on the days of opposition hartals. The consequence clashes cause violence, draw blood and further vitiate the already tense atmosphere. The police are directed to thwart many opposition attempts to

rise of essential goods, stagnation in the field of trade and industry, debacle in the financial sector, dearth of liquidity and so on and so forth. However, these are a measure of inefficiency and mismanagement of the government which will be put to test at the next general election. But, the other issues mentioned above are a factor of

ceeding to the residence of the Vice-Chancellor to voice their grievances. The procession itself was peaceful and there was no justification of the police, albeit at the direction of political authorities, to forcibly thwart attempts of the students to exercise their democratic rights. If they attacked the Vice-Chancellor or damaged any property, the police certainly should have taken appropriate measure. But not before that.

The opposition demand to discuss the issue of violence in the Dhaka University campus was denied by the Speaker, though required notice for this had been duly served by the opposition. The most recent decision of the government to ban simultaneous broadcasting of the proceedings of the parliament and to provide a government resume instead, deprived the nation whatever they could learn about the real situation of the country from opposition legislators, as this could not be manipulated like TV telecasting. The government does not realise how unpopular their action would be to the public. The opposition is being gagged, people are kept in the dark, misinformation galore and democracy is heading to a precipice. An autocratic regime appears to have woken up from its involuntary slumber of 21 years. Whither is the nation being led to? Hopefully not in the direction of the greatest folly of the Awami League of the 70s. Or is it?

The situation has been rendered more complex by the arrest of a large number of Chhatra Dal leaders and workers, led by its president, from a procession on the 26th instant, on various charges. They were pro-



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

peacefully voice their grievances under one pretext or another. The law enforcing agencies of the government is known to have always obliged the administration, this time more so perhaps because of policy change and due to heavier doses of intimidation and material incentives.

All these have worsened the situation that is warranted for the healthy growth of a democratic tradition. People are dismayed due to many other reasons too. The spiral in prices

democracy and determines the strength of its roots and potentiality of its growth, hence are a matter of deep concern for all. To cap it all, conflicts in the student front have compounded all the bitterness and reinforced enmity between major political parties.

The most recent serious incident of gun battle in Dhaka University campus took place on the 22nd and 23rd instant in which one leader of the Awami League's student wing, Chhatra

Unsavoury Episode — JS Sanctity Defiled

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

Over the past several years we have had enough of mud-slinging. Though ostensibly we have been expressing our great concern for the national sovereignty, national economy and all that, we have by now proved that our major concern is for self alone.

SPEAKER Humayun Rashid Chowdhury — a former seasoned diplomat appeared to have lost all his diplomatic grains beholding a few disgruntled invaders in the guise of Parliament members approaching his rostrum. They showed him shoes, they threw paper-balls, torn files, folders at him, they raised their clenched fists, profusely showering from their lips popularly known as 'bullet' words in shanties are normally used. Some of them did an 'excellent' footwork on TV camera stand felling the costly instrument down to the floor. They were all in utter frenzy and forgot momentarily that the TV cameraman whom they mauled was none of their political adversaries. Such a tragic scene was enacted in the floor of the Jatiya Sangsad. The viewers were the whole nation. This writer could not believe his eyes when he saw on the TV screen professor Badruddoza Chowdhury, whom the countrymen respected as a highly placed educationist, a physician par excellence, a gentleman every inch and of course an aristocrat by breed and family heritage, would assume the lead role. It was equally unbelievable that a one time brilliant scholar and thorough bred civil servant M K Anwar would have played the second fiddle. Nor it was a palatable scene to watch former speaker Sheikh Razaque Ali, a veteran lawyer and jurist joining the 'free' for all bandwagon and desecrate the sacred seat which only the other day he did ornate.

Obviously, the 'gentlemen' were over charged with emotional spates and could not hold on to the reins of sanity. We may have reasons to believe however, their other colleagues in the opposition bench, whose wisdom did not betray them, would never have appreciated the awkward acrobatics of their seniors. Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury soon collected himself out of such a stupor and readily named at least 14 BNP MPs including Badruddoza Chowdhury against whom action as per rule would be proposed later. Meantime, he forbids these fourteen opposition members from participating in the Sangsad proceedings. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina very emphatically condemned the incident and opted for punitive measures against the 'offenders'. But, in the same breath she had shown the rare grace suggesting that the speaker would be within his rights to forgive them as well.

Begum Zia, on the other hand, expressed her scepticism about speaker's version of the unfortunate episode. Since, at the time of occurrence she was not present she was naturally expected to have withheld her observations till such time she got herself objectively briefed with the other side of the story. Instead of that she allowed her emotions to be covertly played by the perpetrators of such an

uncouth offence if not crime. The speaker appreciated the turmoil within the leader of the opposition and offered the mike to say whatever she wanted and as much as liked. But she, seemingly unprepared, turned down speaker's generous offer and kept on insisting that the Deputy Leader of the opposition and a few others be allowed to speak. Mr Humayun Rashid Chowdhury held firmly on to his citadel and would not budge an inch. His negation was answered by a walk-out.

The day following Advocate Rahmat Ali, a member from the panel of chairmen, deputized for the speaker. The opposition benches wanted to speak on point of order — many at a time, but Mr Ali alluded to the decision of the speaker the day before and decided not to allow any one of them to speak till speaker's ruling was finally obtained. Such a stance on the part of the Panel Chairman was not at all in conformity with the intention of Mr Humayun Rashid Chowdhury's observations. Those who were not listed by the speaker should have been permitted to speak instead of bracketing all the MPs of BNP. It was a bit surprising to see that he totally forgot speaker's offer to Begum Zia to speak the day before. In any case, this could yet be a debatable issue for both the treasury and the

opposition. If there be any, could, I believe, still be waived in good grace. In spite of the refusal due to the rigidity of the rules of business it is indeed heartening to note that the BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad has asked her party MPs to remain present in the session adding that 'nothing' should go unchallenged. In the extreme case however, she did not exclude going into continuous 'hartal' to tackle the government. This is partially encouraging as it behoves a sense of responsibility to the electorate. But when it comes to 'nothing' it is apt to rouse reservation about the end-result. Still then, it is likely to provide a temporary respite in the otherwise bubbling situation.

I came across a news item that the 14 BNP MPs named by the speaker were likely to get reprieve or even they might be condoned. A top leader of BNP was reported to have been in touch with the speaker to get the vexing matter amicably settled. No doubt a move in that direction would set in a good omen but there would yet be something to be said. This was not the first time that the speaker had to swallow such bitter pills. In the past too, some particular legislators in the opposition

bench used filthy language tarnishing the sanctity of Jatiya Sangsad. Mr Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, true to his trait, displayed the height of magnanimity. If he does ultimately repeat the same dispensation it would not surprise any body. But, would there be any guarantee that similar untoward incident would not occur again? Such a natural question will invoke the necessity of a sort of deterrent measure as would be helpful to prevent recurrence of similar or even worse incidents.

Some cabinet ministers in their condemnation of the (April 15, 1998) sad incident alluded to a public meeting at Netrakona where Begum Zia was reported to have hinted at 'certain mishappening' in coming days. They wondered if the sacrifice of the Speaker's rostrum had any link with the BNP Chairperson's version. I would love to believe that it was just a strange coincidence and there would not be any such linkage. At least the leader of the opposition in Parliament would not be expected to have been bereft of the sense of responsibility that her elevated position would naturally demand. Alternatively, it could just be a sort of blunt cajoling of the Prime Minister when she hinted to some 'startling' news few days ago. Be what it may we are presently very much intrigued and disturbed at the wild succession of events and would beg of both the entities to command caution and restraints.

Over the past several years we have had enough of mud-slinging. Though ostensibly we have been expressing our great concern for the national sovereignty, national economy and all that, we have by now

proved that our major concern is for self alone. Barring the instances of the so-called political victimisation (the stale and often untrue coinage to draw sympathies) how many of those already imputed or chargesheeted for specific act of their innocence. Squandering of public money when in power has been a very favourite past-time with many of the people. In fact this has been almost a perpetual malady in the political and business leadership in the third world countries. Bangladesh is no exception to such a grim reality. Interestingly, the acts of corruption, even known to somebody, are never exposed when someone is in power. But it should no more go that way. We have had some examples otherwise in neighbouring India, South Korea and most recently in Iran. The most formidable Mayor of Teheran — a trusted lieutenant of Iranian President Khatami could not escape the long hand of law. The people of Iran have been promised a public trial of the mayor facing numerous corruption charges. This mayor had been the principal election campaign manager for Khatami and is now languishing behind the bars despite large popular support. None in the Administration — not to speak of the President, has uttered a single word for his release. He has to face full court proceedings and that is the grim reality.

And on the other hand our administration has been totally inactive much to the dismay of the people at large. The alleged squanderers of public money have been enjoying advance bail and are reportedly trying to manipulate the proceedings of the law enforcing agencies in their favour. I shall repeat that our Prime Minister must no longer bide time so as not to see time running against her. If she wants to play the specific charges of corruption as mere bait for political reasons she will be pitifully mistaken.

ing Speaker Rahmat Ali should apologise for vehemently denying floor to any of the opposition members from BNP on April 16 in retaliation of BNP's doings on the previous day, notwithstanding it should have nothing to do with the normal functioning of the House.

For the sake of accountability and transparency in democratic practice, this tripartite apology is due and once they are done with it, the likelihood of such incidents of national disgrace happening further in the future is lessened to a high degree.

To the Editor...

The face of Dhaka  
Sir, I would like to share some of my experiences while visiting your beautiful country. I found a terrible lack of public toilets in the metropolitan area. Dhaka will get a nice facelift if the city planners ensure public toilets both for males and females and clean air to breathe.

As a business traveller to Dhaka I would appreciate if you arrange a round-table on these topics. The point is that the volume of traffic in the city is actually lower than that of some other Asian capitals but the pollution factor is much higher than that of Bangkok or Colombo. No capitals in the world permit the trucks entering the city at the rush hours — so why should Dhaka?

I heard some bad things about Biman — but my own experience with them is quite positive. I was treated nice — smiling faces, and very efficient cabin crews. Dhaka airport ground staffs were asking me irrelevant questions like why I was carrying, mobil telephone, PC etc.

I was saved by the Biman people.  
M R Store  
Sweden

Pandemonium in the JS  
Sir, We know and understand that a Speaker does not speak. This is a common practice in almost all the national parliaments of all democratic countries. One of our top former official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, now the Speaker of our Jatiya Sangsad, happened to presided over and conducted the General Assembly of the United Nations very successfully and efficiently. We hardly heard him speaking too much in the General Assembly. Sometimes he uttered a few sentences only for a few seconds or one or two minutes. He never became emotional or sentimental.

On retirement from Foreign Service he contested in the last general elections, won a seat and he was elected Speaker of our Parliament. We all expected that under his dynamic leadership and experiences, our JS would be compared and con-

trast between his past performances in the UN General Assembly and his present assignment in our Jatiya Sangsad we are stunned and flabbergasted. Why is there pandemonium in our Jatiya Sangsad?

O H Kabir  
6, Hare Street, Wari,  
Dhaka-1203

The Krishibid Institution

Sir, Bangladesh Krishibid Institution is a professionals' association. Its members are the disciplines of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Veterinary, Agriculture Engineering and Agriculture Economics. In the Constitution of Krishibid Institution it is clearly stipulated that it is a non-political organisation. But very often it is observed that like a political party Krishibid Institution used to react in favour or against any political programme of the country's political parties.

Most of the members of this institution are government employees who are supposed to be above all kinds of politics and to maintain neutrality as servants of the Republic. As a life member of this organisation, I strongly express my indignation with such political activities of Krishibid Institution. In no way they should be involved in the country's political scenario — rather they should dedicate themselves for the cause of agriculture which is in a deplorable condition.

M A Jalil  
372/B, Khilgaon, Dhaka.

Eliminating crimes

Sir, This is to pin point the fact that the law & order in our country has turned bad to worse, especially since the last five to ten years time. Raping of little girls and women, murder, arson and loot, drug, child trafficking, kidnapping, death threats, extortion of money, grabbing of others property, patronising of armed hoodlums and other social menace have reached to an alarming degree. It has also been proved that whichever government came in power failed to combat crimes, mainly due to the political rivalry.

Why and how long should the innocent people at large fall

prey to the prangs and political rivalry? Since, political differences and rivalries have time and again proved a great barrier behind smooth and peaceful existence, therefore, law has to be enforced with iron hands.

K Viqar Moiruddin  
Purana Pallan, Dhaka

Teachers and politics

Sir, Is anyone surprised by the response of teachers regarding banning student politics? How can they stay in their position without teaching and doing any research? How can they keep their absolute power of marking the students at their discretion was not in DU but was a student of DMCC? Whether it was a bit surprising to see that he totally forgot speaker's offer to Begum Zia to speak the day before. In any case, this could yet be a debatable issue for both the treasury and the

The condition in my institution was not any different from that of my friends in DU or BUET. But I should end by saying that I had few great teachers even at DMCC!

K Talat S Islam  
University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, USA

Apology? Yes

Sir, Following the untoward incident in the JS on April 15, I'm fed up with reading and hearing of demands for a unilateral apology from BNP — and it's all so rational that I demand a tripartite apology — one from Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, another from BNP and the other from Presiding Speaker Rahmat Ali.

Observing from an impartial viewpoint, Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury violated the parliamentary norms on April 15 by denying floor to BNP members and giving it to the Home Minister first with the obvious intention of silencing the voice of the opposition in the aftermath of the killing of three of their activists during the strike hours. This is what gave birth to this episode and hence he should apologise in the first place.

BNP should apologise for defaming the Speaker as well as for creating the rowdy scene inside the Parliament.  
Last but not the least, Presid-

ing Speaker Rahmat Ali should apologise for vehemently denying floor to any of the opposition members from BNP on April 16 in retaliation of BNP's doings on the previous day, notwithstanding it should have nothing to do with the normal functioning of the House.

For the sake of accountability and transparency in democratic practice, this tripartite apology is due and once they are done with it, the likelihood of such incidents of national disgrace happening further in the future is lessened to a high degree.

Jamil Ahmed  
Dishari 11, Hovapara  
Sylhet

Controlling the rickshaws

Sir, This is an observation made by me and I am sure is also being observed, by people taking the routes of Uttara to Frangate via Mohakhali.

I am sure these routes are still considered to be VIP, barring the rickshaws to ply on. Unfortunately almost all day long rickshaws can be seen plying from Khilkhet towards Airport round about and from this round about towards various lanes and by-lanes of Uttara. This I am sure is enjoyed by the resident of Uttara as they have ready-made chauffeur-driven vehicle waiting for them to take them at their desired destinations.

I wonder whether it ever occurred to them that they are breaking the law not only by letting the rickshaws to ply on; more seriously by using them to go on the wrong direction. I am sure a good number of the users are conscious citizens of this soil.

The most regrettable observation is the act of our law enforcing agency's taking onto these roads. Are they not aware of the law itself? Or do they have other interest in turing a blind eye to the situation. I hope proper initiative will be taken soon in stopping the rickshaws to ply illegally on these roads, as they are undoubtedly breaking the law as well as risking their lives with others.

An Observer  
Dhaka

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Calling 'Guns R Us'

WHEN five people were killed in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and 11 wounded, I immediately called 'Guns R Us' not line. This is where you can get information on gun accidents from a source more sympathetic to handgunners than the gun-control fanatics, who are trying to take our firearms away from us.

"What happened?" I asked the man on the other end of the line.

"Some children were out looking for deer and shot some students instead. It happens."

"But apparently they weren't looking for game. They wanted to shoot people."

"That's what the newspapers say, but there is always another side to the story. Look, nobody wants somebody to get shot with a gun. But we can't keep tabs on every child in school. We're certainly not going to make these kids who did the shooting out poster boys, but at the same time, we're not going to stop young men from defending themselves, if that is what all this was about."

"How did the membership of Guns R Us react when they heard the news?"

"They were horrified. They knew that there would be the usual stink when someone gets killed with a semiautomatic. This was more embarrassing because the kids had all sorts of weapons. It makes us look bad."

"Besides saying that you're sorry, what do you plan to do?"

"Raise dues from members of the gun lobby. This one could get the public's attention, and the only way we can stop legislation to plead for money to keep our legislators in line."

"I said, 'I'll say this for you — you're really on the ball. The anti-gun people haven't been heard from at all.'"

"That's what we get more respect from Congress. Every dollar we spend on legislation will protect an innocent gun owner from becoming wounded by what happened in Jonesboro."

"Would it make any sense to pass a law forbidding 13-year-olds to carry guns?"

"No, because next year they would raise it to 14-year-olds, then 15-year-olds, and pretty soon no one could carry a gun."

"One more question."

"Could I call you back? I have Charlton Heston on hold."

By arrangement with UNB and Los Angeles Times Syndicate.