

A Pole Star Lost

We are profoundly shocked. Shaikat Usman, the outstanding litterateur, a moral guide of the nation, is dead. Having stood there for over forty years as an epitome of conscience, reason, enlightenment and humanism Sheikh Azizur Rahman, better known as Shaikat Usman — his nom de plume — breathed his last Thursday morning at a city hospital. The octogenarian savant who had been fighting age and an assortment of ailments died of brain haemorrhage at the age of 83.

What made Shaikat Usman such a revered personality? Was it his literary talent, his 90 odd oeuvres in prose and poetry? Or was it his political writings? Or the rebel in him that reverberated in protest whenever humanity was insulted, people's rights were robbed by tyrannical regimes and preferred the sufferings of exile to the comfort and convenience of a compromised life back home? Perhaps all.

Shaikat Usman was the last of the Mohicans for whom life was a wonderful gift to be used for creative and collective purpose. Neither the lofty ideals of his youth nor his love and devotion for literature could dissociate him from a life that could so spontaneously echo the groan, the laughter of the man in the street.

Few deaths are deemed as much of an irreparable loss to the nation as to the families concerned. Shaikat Usman's is truly one such death that will be felt by this nation in its journey through time; in its dreams and nightmares; in its weal and woe. Though he will never be among us corporeally he will continue to be our source of inspiration in times of crisis when muddled thoughts and blind passion get the better of reason and humanity. We mourn the passage of nation's pole star, The Daily Star's Man of the Year for 1997, and extend our sincerest sympathies to the bereaved family.

PM's Tough Talks

Speaking to the doctors last Thursday during the 15th national convention of Bangladesh Medical Association Sheikh Hasina said bluntly 'Do your job properly or quit.' It is high time that such a forthright comment was due from the head of the government. Our rural health complexes are seldom, if ever, served by the government doctors who are posted there. Whenever a doctor, generally the junior ones, is posted in any rural health complex, his first attempt is to do 'tadbir' (lobbying Bangladesh style) to have such a posting cancelled. In the event that fails he then takes such a posting only in name, shows up there occasionally (or when ministers or high officials visit) and spends most of the time in Dhaka either in private practice or just with family and friends. PM is right on target when she asks why take a government job when there is absolutely no intention of being even remotely sincere about it.

Why is it such a big deal to ensure that doctors actually serve the locality where they are posted? How many Thana Health Complexes are we talking about? Given a total of 468 thanas, and assuming that each have a health complex we are definitely not talking about a large number of doctors. We suspect that along with the concerned doctors the supervisory mechanism controlled by the health ministry is also in this game. Therefore for PM's warning to bear any fruit the ministry itself will have to punish the officials who connive with the health complex doctors to enable them to be absent from their duty stations.

We also suggest that along with the 'stick' there should also be some 'carrot' in the form of higher pay, tax privileges and bonus which should make a rural posting attractive. Appeal to doctors' sense of service to humanity is fine, but will be of limited impact. But then again how can the 'mission of service to humanity' be totally de-linked from this noble profession and how can doctors live with a clear conscience if it is done?

We hope the doctors do not end up saying 'How can you expect us to be different when the rest of the society has become so corrupt and does things only for profit?' These arguments only increase the rot and do not help us to become better than we are. We want demonstrated leadership to improve the lot of the common people. Let the doctors take the lead in a changing process that will affect all other professions. So instead of being like the rest, be morally superior and make the rest of the society follow you.

Chittagong Shows the Way

It was not one of those imposed whims of any political party that brought businesses in Chittagong to stand still last Wednesday. Rather businessmen all and sundry unitedly called a six-hour strike to register their protest against unmitigated terrorism, a curse that has come to paralyse the economic life of the port city. Chittagong has experienced a frightening rise in murder, abduction and extortion in the last few months. Quite naturally businessmen are the principal victims of these organised crimes.

More than the rise in crime it is law enforcing agency's failure to protect the life and property of the citizens which has given rise to utmost frustration among people. The business community's call of strike is actually a last resort to survive in a desperate situation. We sympathise with their cause. We also congratulate the business community for having provided the elusive leadership in initiating social resistance against criminals. As a plan to deal with the problem of political patronisation of criminals it has decided to ostracise the political leaders and the influential members of the society who provide shelter to the anti-socials.

We have always observed unless a social movement is begun effectively, mere police activism would never have any healing impact on law and order in the country. Criminalisation has spread so deep and wide that the fight has to be started from every doorstep, every homestead. The business community of Chittagong should build on its good work and gradually increase the pressure on the authorities to weed out the criminals from the society. Be it a loan defaulter or a musclemen, let him know immediately he is unwelcome in the society. While urging businessmen in Chittagong to get on with their programme immediately and effectively we also goad other professional groups across the country to take a leaf out of their book and give the crusade against criminalisation the boost it badly needs.

Escalating Tensions in the Sub-Continent

by Dr. A. R. Chowdhury

The nightmare of a global nuclear exchange between the superpowers has receded with the end of the Cold War. But nuclear weapons and the race by smaller powers to acquire them remain a major security threat to the world.

BY conducting three successful underground nuclear tests, followed by two more India openly flexed its nuclear muscle in an attempt to join the world's most exclusive club of five acknowledged nuclear powers — the United States, Russia, China, France, and Great Britain. The first three tests involved three distinct weapons: a fission device similar to the one that India detonated in 1974; a low yield device with tactical potential, and the large thermonuclear bomb. Testing of so large a weapon in Pokhran, close to the Pakistani border, without prior detection proves India's ability to move well beyond the initial stages of nuclear-weapons development. The tests were followed by a government announcement reiterating its support for a 'truly comprehensive international arrangement which would prohibit underground testing of all weapons'.

India's attempt to establish its status as an emerging world power unleashed a barrage of immediate condemnation from Pakistan, the United Nations, the European Union, Japan, the United States and many other countries. Australia, New Zealand, and the United States have decided to recall their ambassadors from New Delhi for immediate consultation while Japanese government officials went so far as calling for a suspension of foreign economic aid to India. The U.S. government may also retaliate, under the Arms Export Control Act, by imposing economic sanctions and suspending foreign aid and military assistance.

Despite adverse international reaction, Indians reacted with understandable pride and glee and viewed it as a milestone for the country.

Avid followers of the Indian political scene will not be tremendously surprised by the recent turn of events. The timing of the test is not completely unexpected. The BJP government has been forthright about its nuclear intentions. The election platform of the BJP clearly stated its intention to re-evaluate the country's nuclear policy and exercise the option to develop nuclear weapons, if necessary. The timing of the test would greatly help the fragile coalition of the Vajpayee government who had been preparing for a rather

stormy session of the Parliament later this month. Now, suddenly the entire nation seems to have united on the nuclear issue and the opposition parties would find it politically difficult to oppose the testing.

Moreover, the tests also indicate the current government's new approach to the critical debate regarding the comparative advantage of nuclear deterrence versus conventional forces, and the opportunity costs of nuclear weapons development versus economic reforms. It appears that the advocates of nuclear and missile development in India have gained significant grounds, taking advantage of the BJP's stated policy of an aggressive nuclear and missile programme.

The fallout from India's nuclear tests could forever change the nuclear landscape in the subcontinent. India's move would surely intensify a nuclear arms race if Pakistan responds by expanding its own nuclear weapons. Pakistan has long claimed to have nuclear capabilities, but has never exploded a nuclear device. India's possession of nuclear weapons may now lead Pakistan to risk international isolation in pursuit of nuclear parity. Pakistan can respond to the Indian test with one of its own, at a site in the Chagai Hills near Afghanistan.

The ongoing arms race between these two countries has already earned the sub-continent the dubious reputation to be one of the world's most likely nuclear battleground. Any decision by Pakistan to match India's move would certainly contribute to that view. India, the first country to propose a ban on nuclear testing, has so far refused to sign both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. India's decision to refrain from signing any non-proliferation treaty reflects its view that acceptance of a total test ban would lead to surrender of its nuclear option before the world's acknowledged nuclear powers had accepted its insistence on global nuclear disarmament, and certainly before Pakistan had demonstrated that it was prepared to jettison its nuclear capability. Citing India's refusal, Pakistan hasn't signed the treaties either.

Given the existing situation, what do the future hold for us in this region? The internationally renowned Institute for National Strategic Studies in a recent study have identified four possible outcomes in the arms race between these two countries:

'Rollback': India and Pakistan are persuaded to roll back their nuclear programmes to zero and sign the non-proliferation treaty.

'Declaration and Escalation': Both countries determine that the current state of non-weaponised deterrence is no longer sustainable and hence declare their nuclear status and accelerate their nuclear weapons and missile programmes.

'Status Quo': Maintenance of a limited ambiguous nuclear status, with both countries refusing to accept the non-proliferation treaty; and

'Regional Deterrence': De facto acknowledgment of quasi-nuclear status for both countries, with adoption of a new international and regional approach to contain the two programmes at current levels.

Prospects of a rollback are virtually nil. Both India and Pakistan have determined that their national security requirements are well-served by at least the potential of a nuclear deterrent.

Outcome (ii), the most alarming of the four, would place the sub-continent's security on a hair trigger with temptation for both countries to decide upon a first strike in a crisis. The latest event suggests that the two countries may be moving in this direction. If both countries declare themselves to be nuclear weapon states, monitoring of their nuclear programmes would be precluded even in the unlikely event that they are admitted to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as weapons states. This is because states with nuclear weapons are effectively protected from scrutiny under the Treaty.

Up till now, the 'Status Quo' outcome had worked effectively for both countries. Neither country had felt the obligation to openly undertake a massive programme to move from a capability to fully developing nuclear weapons. But the latest event has shown that this mutual self-restraint is unlikely to

be sustained in the near future as Pakistan reacts to India's move.

The final outcome of 'regional deterrence' may be the most viable long-term strategy to improve stability and eventually lead to mutual realisation that nuclear proliferation may not be in the best interest of either country. Focusing on the reassurance of both countries, in order to persuade them to freeze current programmes rather than escalate, would require extensive diplomatic negotiation between the two governments, with encouragement and participation by foreign countries and/or international organisations. An integral component of such reassurance would be sharing of intelligence data between the two countries thereby addressing the more alarming aspects of proliferation by refuting alarming and inaccurate reports. This would help to minimise any misapprehension in these two countries about transparency. Such sharing of intelligence data is not new for either India or Pakistan. Sharing of intelligence data during the Indo-Pakistan crises in 1987 and 1990 helped to dispel inaccurate reports which were agitating both sides, and helped avoid escalation into conflict.

Given the historical lack of trust between these two countries, adopting this approach will not be easy, and will require some readjustment of existing thinking about nuclear-proliferation strategies. However, it seems to be the only viable way of diffusing a major security threat not only to the innocent billion people in the sub-continent, but also to the overall security of the region.

The nightmare of a global nuclear exchange between the superpowers has receded with the end of the Cold War. But nuclear weapons and the race by smaller powers to acquire them remain a major security threat to the world. The continued pursuit of nuclear weapons capability by both New Delhi and Islamabad underscores the view that both countries find nuclear deterrence a more essential strategy now than during the Cold War.

The author is a Professor of Economics at Marquette University, Wisconsin, USA.

Why US is So Tough with India on its N Test?

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

US faces a dilemma and the days ahead will only tell us whether US sanctions supported by other Western countries would carry a substantial penalty for India which may discourage other countries holding the tests.

US President Clinton vowed to impose tough sanctions on India for its five underground tests (three on 11 May and two on 13 May). Mr. Clinton described the Indian testing as a defiant threat to global security and called on New Delhi to announce a freeze on further tests and to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The President's planned visit to India, according to senior officials, is in doubt.

Why US is behaving so tough? There are several reasons for President Clinton's tough stand.

One is that US administration believes that the Indian government misled them on the issue of the resumption of nuclear tests. President Clinton had no clue to the conduct of tests by India. The surprise conduct of the tests appeared to have annoyed the President.

The CIA failed to inform the President of India's action. The mighty CIA was caught flat-footed. It failed to detect preparations for India's underground test blasts though the Indian scientific and military personnel were moved to the test site one week before the tests. It is seen as a significant lapse in the US's security.

Pakistan was reported to have advised US in April about the intention of the BJP government to conduct the tests. With all the US satellites hovering in the sky, it is unbelievable that they could not observe anything unusual in Pokhran of Rajasthan. Senator Richard Shelby, the Alabama Republican who chairs the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said the US\$ 27 billion-dollar-a-year espionage organisation was "caught completely off-guard" by the first three tests. It was believed to be possibly the greatest failure of the CIA in a decade.

A second reason is that if India is allowed to go without tough sanctions, the undeclared or potential nuclear countries would be encouraged to hold nuclear tests. One of them, according to US, is Iran who may become nuclear within a few years time. With India lifting its nuclear veil, attention has turned to Pakistan and possibly Iran. US told Pakistan to adopt the high moral ground and not respond to Indian nuclear tests by developing its own nuclear weapons. The worrying question to US, however, appears to be whether Iran will transform its military power into a nuclear one. President Clinton appeared to have in mind deterring nuclear tests by Iran and he thought that the penalty imposed on India might give a message to Iran not to do so.

A third reason appears to be to send a strong message to Russia who is believed to be assisting Iran in setting up nuclear reactors. US wants Russia to know that transfer of nuclear technology to Iran or any other

country would have serious adverse consequences on growing friendly relations between the two. Another concern could be that after President Yeltsin, General Alexander Lebed might hold political power in Moscow after the election in 2000. General Lebed is an independent and strong-willed person and his leadership is likely to pursue more nationalistic agenda. US apprehends that Iran with the assistance of new leadership in Russia could endanger the strategic interests of US.

Another reason appears to be once Iran becomes a nuclear power, it will have an impact on the five Central Asian Republics. The growing revival of Islam in the Central Asian Republics is perceived to be a threat to Europe including Russia. The growing links of the Central Asian Republics with Iran coupled with the resurgence of Islam in this region is not to the liking of US and Europe. The recent agreement with Iran by Turkmenistan to set up a pipeline through Iranian territory for its oil exports is an instance in point. The domination on oil reserves and its distribution from this area by the Western nations may not emerge.

Will the sanctions work? Sanctions could be an effective tool of disapproval against a country, particularly when that country has some degree of leverage over the recalcitrant country or if the entire international community shows its swift and harsh disapproval. Otherwise sanctions do not work, if applied haphazardly. At this point of time, it is not clear whether the attitude of Russia, France and U.K. are as tough as the US's.

Sanctions, on the other hand, may fuel nationalism and this may well prove the case in India. A BJP adviser said that the tests would 'help unify the people' and sanctions may well cement that unity against the world. However, sanctions may have a value if the voters in India see the government's action as unnecessary and irresponsible with the result that the public opinion is changed against the government.

Conclusion: The United States is believed to have worked, long and hard enough to prevent India from conducting the tests. However, BJP government resents US interference. BJP president K. Thakre said the Vajpayee government 'unlike previous regimes, will not give in to international pressure'. US faces a dilemma and the days ahead will only tell us whether US sanctions supported by other Western countries would carry a substantial penalty for India which may discourage other countries holding the tests.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

The Tyranny of the Weak

I used to believe that only the strong are tyrants. But I now believe in the tyranny of the weak.

BEFORE you jump to conclusions, please let me tell you my story.

It begins about three weeks ago, soon after I have moved into my own apartment in this city. I must point out that this is the first time in almost 25 years that I am living on my own in Dhaka and therefore, I am not surprised that there are many events of minor and major importance that singly, and collectively, threaten to drive me round the bend.

For instance, when domestic servants begin to give me 'trouble', I am not all that surprised. I won't deny that I am irritated, but I tell myself I must take it in my stride. These things are bound to happen. If you have perfect strangers living with you, inside your home, under contract to serve you at your whim and fancy, of course there will be moments of tension and unease. You will have to overcome them all, one by one.

Consequently, when my cook suddenly leaves, I am not really upset. She suddenly appears before me, her face long and dismal, her eyes narrow and closed, her lips pursed in a strange kind of grimace. It is about 5 in the evening, and I am rushing around trying to clean up my apartment, prior to the visit of a few colleagues and friends.

What is the matter, I ask her, gently. Why do you look so unhappy?

Her daughter (who lives with her ex-mother-in-law who is sick and has to take care of several abandoned grandchildren other than this one) has hurt herself and word has come from the village that my cook must return home at once.

I have people coming over in about two hours' time. Can't you stay until tomorrow morning, I ask her in a reasonable, mature, grown up sort of tone. After all, we are all adults. I am sure we can discuss this calmly and rationally. Surely, you can wait till tomorrow morning?

An hour later, she is gone. Cook packs her bags and is out of my apartment like a bat out

of hell. I whimper to myself. When I call my sister for help and reinforcements, I try to pretend I am taking it all in my stride. These things happen, I tell my sister. "Sure they do," my sister says quietly.

I ought to explain that I have two other domestic servants, a live-in maid who regularly sings in her sleep and a day-only male servant who sweats profusely around his chin. As far as I am concerned, and this has nothing to do with the respective glandular patterns of these domestics, the two of them more than adequately cater to the needs of my household.

Naturally, neither he nor I can manage any cooking — myself because I am busy trying to earn my living and he because it is woman's work which he will not deign to perform. But both of us, and my driver as well (I explain that I also have a full time driver) have to eat.

Breakfast, tea and snacks are fine, but organising two hot meals a day for the men is daunting. Neither of them offers to lift a finger to help me cook. Or sweep the floor. Or wash the bathroom. Or iron my clothes. Life goes on, of course. My sister steps into the breach and thereafter food miraculously appears as and when it is needed, followed by the appearance of a day woman, a hard-working though somewhat frail creature, who has been arranged by my sister as a 'stop-gap' until the regular troops, as it were, resume duty.

This is when the last of the regulars abandons me.

Around the sixth day of this particularly challenging week, my male domestic with the sweaty chin announces he must go home to his village.

"My daughter is very sick and" he begins. I cut him short. I don't want to know. I don't much care. If your daughter is sick or your wife is pregnant or your uncle has just

passed on. Go. I pack my bags and move in with my sister.

A week later, my cook returns. When I move back into my own apartment she tells me she must have another week off because there is a dispute over land and she must go home.

My singing maid returns. My cook leaves. A very kind friend sends me a new cook, a large, moon-faced woman who hates the singing maid, picks on the day maid, cooks very well, but sleeps like the dead.

My male with the sweat glands returns. He wants an advance on his salary. He still refuses to iron my clothes. Or cook the food. Or sweep the floor. He tells me he has to go home again, soon. I don't bother to hear why.

My singing maid develops a skin rash.

My moon-faced cook says she can't sleep in the same room as the singing maid.

My sister's day woman says her knees hurt.

Two weeks after the beginning of my story, I am coming up the stairs to my apartment when I hear the sounds. They are all screaming. My male domestic, the two women, all three of them are shouting. I hear a thumping noise, like books being thrown.

I ring the door bell. They open the door. Moon face has a scratch on her cheek. My singing maid's hair is disheveled. The male domestic has hair on his shirt collar. My book rack with magazines is lying on the floor, tipped over on one side.

I stare at them for some time.

You know something, I had this notion of an exploited majority, being held to ransom by a powerful minority. I would have laughed in your face if you had even suggested to me that the weak could be strong. I used to believe that only the strong are tyrants.

But I now believe in the tyranny of the weak.



Almas Zakiuddin

Coming Home ...

To the Editor...

BBC on BTV

Sir, Your correspondent, Md. Abdur Rahim Shohel of the University of Dhaka, in complaining about the departure of the BBC World re-broadcast on BTV in the mornings (letters 28th April), is kind enough to describe BBC World as one of the world's most reliable and up-to-date channels. BTV shares that view and has explained to us that the morning BBC World re-broadcast was dropped for staffing reasons alone and point out that the one between 2 and 3 pm continues. BBC World has had a long and cordial relationship with BTV and we shall continue our

discussions about extending BBC re-broadcasts when the staffing situation at BTV allows.

Alan Macdonald
Regional Director for South Asia and the Middle East
BBC World, Wood Lane, London W12

Is society disintegrating?

Sir, Columnist Kabir U Ahmed (DS, May 3) has done well to caution the nation that our society is showing signs of disintegrating, due to ethical and moral lapses (crime, rape, rent-

seeking, toll collection, confrontations, violence, defiance of authority, helplessness of administration, nepotism, bribery, 'might' and 'physical force' as solution, chanda-bazli).

Are the politicians realising that the situation might already be outside their control, and soon they might be victims of their own armed cadres?

We are reaching the point of no-return. What does it mean? Internal revolution. Why? For moral purging the Moral Law of Compensation has never failed. Bangladesh cannot escape. We reap what we sow!

A Husnain
Dhaka

Game of words

Sir, Recently the Israeli PM has rejected a peace initiative for the ME by the US. The Americans propose Israeli withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank. But the Clinton administration themselves made a written promise that 'Israel alone would decide the extent of the withdrawals'.

Why is the US playing this game of words? Are they trying to show that though they have a majority Israel backing in the US yet they are fair?

Masroor Ahmed Deepak
Dhaka

Shazneen's Murder A Reader Asks

Sir, I have followed the news appearing in your esteemed daily and others dailies and tabloid. But following areas are still gray for me:

A) Was it possible for a lone boy servant to attack his master's daughter when all the inmates of the house were present and all guardians were at stairs away, unless some agents (man or dope) was used in his (servant's) support?

B) A well-groomed Miss Shazneen at fifteen, when annoyed with the culprit, would have screamed/cursed at the top of her voice, for the reflex of her nerves, at the sight of knife in the hand of the culprit. Again on such alarm, any culprit, as per psychology of lone offender, would have frightened and turned his tail immediately (since many people were around). More so, once maid Parvin and offender discovered each other, when he was committing that.

C) If Parvin's 'panic call' needed immediate attention, how the culprit got time to wipe the blood stains with tissue paper, collected the knife after violating the girl and washed both hands and knife, wore his trousers and escaped through a safe route unnoticed?

D) Parvin was the sole visitor (except culprit as facts appeared in press) of Miss Shazneen's room, in that episode, twice before the incidence and finally before she (Parvin) broke the news to others. Was she being told/asked to attend Miss Shazneen, then by whom and had anyone confirmed that?

E) Probably (as most villas are having), Mr. Latifur Rahman's house is having intercom/calling bell system from each room to kitchen/pantry/attendants, thus Miss Shazneen's room will have one same to call the domestic helpers. If Miss Shazneen wanted not to disturb her privacy, she could easily do so by using intercom/calling bell. Why then, Parvin needed to observe the progress of Miss Shazneen's dinner off and on?

F) Was that a full dinner laid for Miss Shazneen or some tidbits? If it was a dinner (if she was so hungry), she would have preferred to have that at laid

out spot and not on the bed. G) Could she finished her meal, before she met her assailant. If not where did the left-overs go?

H) Did police cease all the unused foods and used utensils of victim for forensic tests of existence of unusual substances. If those were disposed off before police could get hold, who was keen to do so and on whose directive?

I) What was the viscera test report? I hope authority would make it public.

J) If the episode was a conspiracy against Mr. Rahman's family, then an efficient and not easily detectable doping agent(s) must have been used to decapitate Miss Shazneen before crime was committed, so that episode leaves an embarrassing horror but no alarming screams and no trace of godfather. We hope, efficient viscera test and post-mortem would reveal some clue.

K) If hair pulling sign was in Miss Shazneen's scalp, it would show, whether a lone rapist pulled to overpower her or to hold her tight against floor to keep her supine, before all devilish brutal crimes were committed.

Even if it was a small table bird, after its slaughter, it would have taken time and space (about few sq yards) to toss around, until it completely collapsed. If Miss Shazneen was in full senses or not held tightly by more than one person, then after such stabbing she would have rolled all over the floor, before she succumbed to her injuries.

L) An expert of erotic science would be able to give correct picture, whether a lone rapist could still keep her urge alive, after fight, amid fear, tension, exhaustion (of repeated stabbing), to satisfy his carnal desire with a corpse soaked in a pool of blood?

I hope some experts on the above, would give their views impartially. We know Miss Shazneen would never return to us, but let her this sacrifice allow to lift some masks off our society and let us know the chemistry of criminals.

A R Chowdhury
H-39, Rd#11, Sect-4,
Uttara-Dhaka-1230