

A Pole Star Lost

We are profoundly shocked. Shaukat 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 Shaukat 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 Shaukat 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.

Shaukat 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. Shaukat 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 muscleman, 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 prepare 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-weapons 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;

'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 (iii), 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 state. 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 negotiations 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-Pakistani 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.

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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 at all 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 accommodate 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 maid 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 (did I explain that I also have a full-time driver) have a full-time driver to be.

My singing maid returns. 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 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 'stopgap' 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 my daughter is sick or your wife is pregnant or your uncle has just

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