

Pronouncements Mocked at

A fierce factional fight within the BCL at Dhaka Government College has claimed the life of Monir Hossain, a senior Psychology Department student, the only surviving son of a family whose other sibling having lost his life to terrorism earlier on. How many families have been hollowed out at the blood-soaked altar of criminalised student factionalism which seems the acutest in the ruling party student front being fueled by the feel of power and a sense of immunity?

This is yet another example of what happens when student politics becomes criminalised. While both the BNP and the AL have gangsters in their fold, we urge the ruling party to take the lead in ridding themselves of this curse. The logic for our urging is simple — the ruling party has the entire government machinery at its command to come blazing and chasten the armed malcontent of its student front. If in spite of all this the ruling party fails to control the gun-running on the campus and its peripheries, exacerbated by internecine conflicts within its student front, then there is but one conclusion to draw: This makes nothing short of a mockery of the government or the ruling party itself. All the pronouncements from the pulpit that terrorists belong to no party and therefore there is no question of sheltering them anywhere, sound farcical.

The Dhaka College authorities must have been pooh-poohed by the sheer political muscle of the infighting raging over construction tenders, footpath collections, and rentals from tempo stand which have been regular sources of income for students in the surrounding belt. They have staged many a bloody gun-battle over apportionment rights. The area must be a jewel in the crown of political supremos around it who seem keen on retention and expansion of their sphere of influence over a rival factional chief ready in the wings for a grab.

It is a much deeper malaise than the surficial eruptions can readily uncover. They do not just make up armed circles, they are charmed circles, too lolling in the constant lure of money, more money as President Shahabuddin aptly underlined at the Rajshahi University Convocation the other day.

The Prime Minister owes it to the nation to come down heavily on the armed factions of her own party's student cadres by first neutralising those local AL leaders who exploit them for personal political gains. This could be the right precursor of a serious move by her to draw the opposition into a consensual dissociation with their student cadres — all at a time.

AIDS: Educate the Youth

World AIDS Day, which was observed in Bangladesh as elsewhere around the globe on Tuesday, brings a new message every year. The underlying message, that HIV/AIDS is a fatal disease which can only be prevented through behavioural change, remains the same. But this year's theme has brought the vulnerability as well as responsibility of the youth into focus. The fact that HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is transmitted mainly through blood or semen makes the young most vulnerable. The question is, are we sensitising our youth enough about the danger to forestall an epidemic outbreak in the coming decade?

So far, the government has acknowledged just 102 cases of HIV, out of which 10 have developed AIDS. These figures look astonishingly low for a disease that is rampant in neighbouring countries, and for which there are no preventive vaccines. The government takes satisfaction from the assumption that Bangladesh's conservative Muslim society does not encourage promiscuity, this making Bangladesh a low-incidence area as far as HIV transmission is concerned. But UN agencies estimate that there are at least 21,000 HIV-positive people in the country. The government appears to be caught in a dilemma. It does not wish to acknowledge high incidence of HIV transmissions; but it does not wish to ignore the danger either. But when the danger is as real as the threat of HIV/AIDS, then there is little room for complacency, even less for prevarication.

Protection of the youth from HIV/AIDS needs to become an overriding concern for the health establishment. While treatment and counseling of HIV-positive people and AIDS patients is prime duty of both the state and families, the focus has to be on prevention. Appeals to young people's sense of morality and warnings against promiscuity may be politically correct, but these are not enough, because it may not be realistic to expect the youth to practice abstinence. Instead, the government needs to campaign positively on the importance of safe sex. Proper counseling at schools and colleges need to be introduced to deter the youth from the path of risky sexual adventures. The question of sex education, as a vehicle of information and advice designed to promote healthy behaviour, has to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Dr Sharfuddin Remembered

We pay our tribute to Dr Al-Muti Sharfuddin who passed away in Dhaka on Monday at the age of 68. He was suffering from cancer. He has left indelible impressions on our minds as an eminent scientist and more still as a prolific science writer. In spite of his pressing preoccupations as an important public servant, Dr Sharfuddin found time to write on science in lucid Bangla for the ordinary people and specially for the children.

He had served on important committees and commissions and was actively associated with organisations ranging from Shahitya and Lekhok Sangsad to Kochi-Kanchar Mela and Bangladesh Shishu Academy. He was twice jailed for his involvement in progressive student politics but he could not be shaken from his beliefs in freedom, fair-play and justice.

In his many splendoured career Dr Sharfuddin received a number of prestigious awards including the Ekushey Padak, Bangla Academy Award, Shishu Academy Award and the UNESCO Award for his contribution towards enriching our literature and for popularising science among common people. He made a contribution to the field of journalism by editing a book on Bengali language in newspapers.

A brilliant student of the Dhaka University Dr Sharfuddin excelled in whatever field he wanted to tread. In this era of mediocrity that has cast its ominous shadow over the society, the death of Dr Sharfuddin has created a vacuum that will take long to be filled in. While paying our homage to the departed soul we send our heart-felt condolences to the members of his bereaved family.

THE next Commonwealth summit in South Africa is less than a year away, but this meeting is more important for Bangladesh than usually is the case. The organisation itself is important enough, and the bi-annual CHOGM or Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting provides a unique opportunity for leaders of 54 states to build those rapport. But it is the election to the post of the Commonwealth Secretary General that Bangladeshis would be most keenly watching.

However, the keen watchers are already detecting something that is not wholly in tune with the task at hand. The decision to nominate former foreign secretary and current executive chairman of the Board of Investment, Farooq Sobhan as Bangladesh's candidate has not caused too many eyebrows to be raised. But eyebrows are certainly being raised at the apparent lack of institutional efforts to secure the election.

Although there is still a year to go before the summit, these months would pass pretty quickly as Commonwealth leaders, like anyone else, are embroiled in various domestic or regional issues. Fall out from South Africa's recent fray into Lesotho may occupy Nelson Mandela's mind for the months ahead. Mahathir Mohammad is too embroiled in economic and political crises at home to keep abreast of news about Commonwealth candidatures. The point is that these leaders and others have to be convinced about the seriousness of the Bangladesh candidature, and that conviction has to be sustained.

The only way such a conviction can be achieved is through skillful lobbying by diplomats, positive projections in the international media and personal appeals by the Prime Minister to her counterparts. The last part is critical because, unlike any other international organisation, in the election to the post of Secretary General of the Commonwealth, the heads of government themselves cast the votes. In a way, their votes are personal votes, as well as being votes of their respective governments. This means the lob-

bying has to be conducted both at the official level from the foreign ministry, and at the personal level from the Prime Minister.

Now that the flood emergency has gone, the Prime Minister can be expected to give the matter more time and energy. But the ground for her personal intervention needs to be prepared by the foreign ministry, through dispatch of special envoys, campaigns in the international media etc. These things are not, as yet, happening.

Sobhan is currently on a three-week trip to the Caribbean where he is meeting regional heads of government. But this campaign cannot be left to the personal initiative of the candidate alone, because he is not his own candidate. The government of Bangladesh has nominated Sobhan, and any slackness in the foreign ministry's efforts would be tantamount to willful disregard for the national will.

The decision to nominate Sobhan may not have gone down a bomb in the country's notoriously fractious and jealously-ridden bureaucracy, but few objective observers doubt that he is the right candidate, at the right time and for the right job. It may even be argued that Bangladesh has rarely, if ever, put forward a candidate with such high realistic chances of success, because of the candidate's own credentials, but even more due to the nature of the organisation itself.

So far, the Bangladesh candidature has received highly positive feedback from African and Asian members of the Commonwealth. India is yet to decide whether it would put forward a candidate or not. But in the post-nuclear environment, India is not exactly the Third World's darling. New

Glimmer of Global Leadership Beckons Bangladesh

In the complex world of international organisations, it is difficult for a developing country, particularly a least-developed country (LDC) like Bangladesh to contest an election for a major post. The humiliation in Rome four years ago bears ample testimony to what might happen when the wrong candidate is nominated at the wrong time for the wrong job.

Delhi would do far better to back Bangladesh as a common Asian candidate. In fact, as a fellow member of Saarc, Dhaka would be well within its rights to expect Indian support for its candidature.

However, despite clear signals that Bangladesh's candidature is being viewed with positive appreciation in most Commonwealth capitals, the bureaucracy at Segun Bagicha is yet to get its head together. At the moment, Sobhan's chances appear as good as, if not better than those of his opponent but, there are still some attempts to sow seeds of confusion.



The Outside Story

BY SABIR MUSTAFA

Initially, Bangladesh's decision to put forward a candidate in the election did seem a little audacious, given recent experiences at international organisations. For instance, during the election to the post of Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 1994, Dhaka persisted with its challenge despite the fact that the African group had closed ranks behind the candidature of Senegal's Jacques Diouf. The result was a debacle, with even Muslim states deserting Bangladesh.

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what might happen when the wrong candidate is nominated at the wrong time for the wrong job. But the UN system is a whole lot different from the Commonwealth, which does pride in being a 'family of English-speaking nations'.

Although all member-states contribute to operational budgets of UN organisations, they are largely financed by a handful of industrialised nations. This gives the industrialised North, with about a quarter of the world's population, a disproportionately large representation in the top posts of multilateral bodies. The presidency of the World Bank, for instance,

nancial clout and political relevance in the world arena before doing so.

In the final analysis, though, demonstrated economic achievements or a highly proactive foreign policy would be necessary to project Bangladesh as a player of importance, commensurate with the country's immense size in terms of population. In this context, Bangladesh's decision in 1990 to contribute troops to the US-led coalition in the Gulf was an astute move. Since then, Dhaka's readiness to participate in UN peacekeeping operations has had an equally positive impact, so far as gaining a foothold in the corridors of international power is concerned.

The critical factor, however, would remain attitude and self-perception. So long as Dhaka is unable to see itself as a leader in the global arena, it will continue to remain irrelevant. Bangladesh needs to think of itself as one of the 10 largest nations on earth, rather than as one of the 50 poorest countries. Instead of going to the world to see what others can give, Bangladesh needs to invite the world to find out what we have to offer.

The Commonwealth election is one opportunity where Bangladesh can demonstrate it is confident of contributing, and not just be contributed to. The Commonwealth offers a platform on which Bangladesh can unveil a new agenda for itself, and offer the family of English-speaking nations a refreshing perspective, through a new kind of leadership.

The election is currently a two-horse race, with New Zealand foreign minister Don McKinnon being the only challenger to Sobhan's candidature. New Zealand is one of four advanced economies in the Commonwealth along with the UK,

Canada and Australia. These four make up the so-called 'Old Commonwealth'. For more than four decades, these four have dominated the Commonwealth Secretariat, even though the past two Secretary-Generals have been from the 'New Commonwealth' or non-white former British colonies decolonised since World War II.

The point Sobhan is making — and the message Bangladesh diplomats should be taking to every Commonwealth member-state — is that it is Asia's turn to be given the leadership of the organisation. Besides, the Old Commonwealth dominates the Secretariat anyway, so it would be quite discomfiting to have a representative of the same old club as the Secretary General as well.

Furthermore, since the Commonwealth has now adopted a more proactive, political role, it would make simple common sense to have a representative from the developing world as the Secretary General. Whichever way one looks at it, the New Zealand candidature looks illogical and the Bangladesh candidate appears most appropriate.

These messages are likely to strike a favourable chord in Asian, African and Caribbean capitals. But for such jingles to translate into votes at the summit, a lot of hard work will have to be put in. As Sobhan said in an interview recently, 'This is one election Bangladesh can win, but this is also an election Bangladesh can lose'.

At the end of the day, it all boils down to a matter of will. If Bangladesh has the will to win then it can do so, by taking the message to the Commonwealth leaders and projecting itself as a nation ready to shoulder the responsibility of leadership. If it fails to do the necessary groundwork, then Bangladesh's candidature may not appear serious. Since the election may well be decided on the basis of the perception Commonwealth leaders have about Bangladesh's candidature, the importance of groundwork between now and next November can hardly be over-emphasised.

Is There a Light in the Dark Tunnel in Kosovo?

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

The Hill Plan provides a compromise for both parties. For Yugoslavia, Kosovo is within the fold of its Federation and is denied its independence while for KLA it's a big step forward in its political struggle of being recognised as a separate republic and not a part of Serbia.

IT appears that the threat of aerial bombardment of Serbian armed forces and military equipment by the NATO has some therapeutic value to both Serbian and KLA's (Kosovo Liberation Army) leadership. It is reported that the representative of KLA has agreed that Kosovo could be a republic within the Federation of Yugoslavia in accordance with the plan devised by the US Ambassador Christopher Hill. This shift of attitude by KLA may facilitate the end of conflict in Kosovo.

From the very beginning, KLA was firm in its stand that Kosovo would be a separate independent entity from Serbia and fought against Serbian armed forces and police since February last. The demand for the independence of Kosovo was rejected by the Yugoslavian authorities which began military attacks on the KLA and the Kosovo civilians. Neither the NATO nor Russia for reasons of their own support the independence of Kosovo although the NATO have demonstrated their sympathy for the Kosovo and warned Yugoslavia to stop the repression of the Kosovars by the security forces.

The Kosovo conflict has the potential to embroil the neighbouring countries such as Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria

and Turkey into a regional war because of ethnicity and religion of Albanians. Unlike the Serbs, the Kosovars are not Slavs by race and orthodox Christians by faith. They are Muslims and ethnically different from Serbs, Albania and Turkey are Muslim countries and the Albanian Muslims constitute a sizeable segment of population in Macedonia. Bulgaria has an eye on the eastern part of Macedonia and may likely to grab it if there is a political turmoil in Macedonia. If Bulgaria intervenes, Turkey may not remain a silent spectator. If Turkey is involved, its arch-rival Greece may step in the foray.

What makes the Kosovo conflict most worrisome is that on the one hand it could endanger the European stability and on the other it could involve Russia and Germany at opposite sides. EU's plan to strengthen intra-state relationship through its monetary policies and the introduction of Euro currency next year may be placed in jeopardy. The US was working behind the scene to forge a common stand for a political settlement of Kosovo together with KLA and Kosovo civilian leadership.

Under Yugoslav Federal Constitution of 1974, Kosovo

constituted an autonomous unit of Serbia. The autonomous status was annulled in 1989 by the then Serbia's President Slobodan Milosevic without the consent of the Kosovars and Kosovo was integrated with Serbia. This integration was the seed planted by the Serbian President which generated the ethnic conflicts between the Kosovars and Serbians. This was exacerbated since February last turning half a million Kosovars as refugees living in a desperate conditions.

The Hill Plan envisages that Kosovo becomes a separate republic within the Federation of Yugoslavia and will have the same status as that of other republics, Serbia and Montenegro. The representative of KLA appeared to have accepted this Hill proposal with a condition that after three years the Kosovars would be given an opportunity to exercise the right of self-determination. The exercise of self-determination by the Kosovars appears to be the sucking problem which needs to be resolved.

President Milosevic of Yugoslavia realises that the economic sanctions are biting hard his national and his political power could be threatened. The recent sacking of the armed forces chief demonstrates the internal tension

within the leadership. The President is reported to have installed his own 'person' as the chief of the armed forces. Yugoslavia is getting isolated and all the countries in the world say, 'don't do this'. It becomes harder for Mr. Milosevic to sustain the military attacks on the Kosovars. President Milosevic cannot continue to push aside friends and allies and fight for Serbs. The international support for Kosovars is generating a sense of anxiety for the Serbian leadership.

The Hill Plan provides a compromise for both parties. For Yugoslavia, Kosovo is within the fold of its Federation and is denied its independence while for KLA it's a big step forward in its political struggle of being recognised as a separate republic and not a part of Serbia. The only difficult issue which needs to be resolved whether and when the Kosovars will be able to exercise the right of self-determination to decide the final status of Kosovo. If a compromise is arrived at, the international community will avoid the risk of contributing to a messy situation in the Balkans.

The writer is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the United Nations in Europe, Geneva.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Yunus in 'Science'

Sir, Many Bangladeshis don't know that most elegant scientific journal of the world *Science* published an illustrated article of Dr Muhammad Yunus on 16th October, 1998. If anyone don't know what the 'Science' is, then very difficult to assume its importance. In spite of labourous and relentless research throughout their entire life many scientists fail to get their papers published in *Science*.

I don't know precisely, may be he is the first Bangladeshi to date who have a publication in *Science*. It's rather unnecessary to write something about Mr Yunus but it's unfortunate that we failed to notice it.

Ratan Kumar Banik
Japan

Delayed departures

Sir, On 3rd November '98, I was going to Mymensingh and while waiting at Kamapur Railway Station for more than half an hour beyond schedule time of 9:30am for the Padma Express to depart, I suddenly noticed that other express trains were also awaiting for departure. On enquiry, railway officials told me some that some VIPs' praying programme at Banani graveyard

for the national leaders who were killed on that day had detained all the trains, for the convey would pass over the Mahakhal railway crossing. I also found some passengers grumbling for delaying departure of their trains. Then around 10:15am other express trains started to leave the station when presumably clearance was received by the railway officials. The Padma Express left the station just at 10:25am — 55 minutes behind schedule.

This was not the end. The delayed departures continued throughout the day. Again while I was returning from Mymensingh by the Padma Express on the same day it was again late by an hour because it was late in the morning, as told by the railway officials of Mymensingh railway station.

Javed Akhter
Pallabi, Dhaka

The primates and we

Sir, William Raspberry wrote a piece in the *Washington Post*, captioned 'Save the Males' in January 1994. The salient features of this write-up may be summed up as:

Stumptail monkeys and rhesus monkeys have one interesting difference. The former

is quick to anger and just as quick to calm down and make peace. The latter, fiercely violent and quick to confrontation, rarely reconcile afterwards.

Scientists wondered if the stumptails could be used to teach the rhesus how to get over their anger and work toward peacekeeping? Later, the scientists at some experimental station induced stumptails to raise eight rhesus juveniles for about six months. The results were fascinating.

The under-training, rhesus monkeys of about 22-months age when introduced to the programme never stopped fighting each other. But to the scientists' pleasant surprise, by the end of the experimental study, they were making up just as often as their stumptail tutors.

Before rhesus monkey kids used to sulk after every fight but on completion of their training, they uttered low, soothing chatter and brushed against each other after a fight. Scientists came up with the finding that the rhesus monkeys were really learning peacekeeping skills from the social environment. The study concluded that if monkeys can be taught to reduce their natural violence — surely human beings can learn to reduce their socially induced violence.

So let us accept that there is one party who compares well with the rhesus monkeys and the other is stumptail monkeys.

Syed Waliullah
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

The "in-vain" Venice

Sir, The news item in the DS, published on November by Mr. Moshed Ali Khan about land contiguous to Dhamond Lake purchased my brow. How could the office of Ministry of Public Works and Housing under a tough, vibrant and strong Minister 'Surrender to Encroachers'?

It is indeed a matter of misfortune that erstwhile Dhaka which, with plan and foresight, could be made into a Venice of the East, is becoming an unplanned concrete jungle consuming almost all waterbodies that once networked the city. What shocked me most is that instead of penalising the encroachers of land around the Dhamond Lake, the official committee of the Ministry concerned is considering to allocate the encroached land to the encroachers at an official price which is far less than the market price! Why?

If there is no alternative but to yield to the encroachers, the latter should at least be charged a penal rate which should be more than the market price. The fine would reflect the authority's disapproval of the encroachers' action. If nothing out of the norm is done it will be a weakness shown by the Ministry, an indulgence which may be replicated by other authorities.

Ahsanur Rahman
Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

Art Buchwald's COLUMN A Tough Choice

DURING Desert Storm I was one of the few reporters to reveal why the United States could not knock off Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

The explanation was that everyone in Iraq looked like Saddam, and we couldn't tell one from another.

At the beginning of his regime Saddam was concerned about assassination so he came up with the idea that every male citizen in the country had to look exactly like him.

This included the mustache, the haircut and the black beret. People who did not resemble Saddam to the secret police's satisfaction were arrested and sent to work as slave labour in a poison gas factory.

Thus started a long line of Saddam Hussein look-alikes who have been driving the CIA and everyone else crazy.

What makes the story more interesting is that when two people meet on the street they have no idea which Saddam they are talking to. One could be a citrus grower from Baghdad and the other the leader of the country.

This has been the problem for the United States from the start. If you are going to cut off the head of a snake, which snake are we talking about?

Recently they tell the story of the real Saddam Hussein and an imposter at a people's rally.

The fake Saddam had medals all over his chest. The real Saddam was covered with flies. The people went crazy for the false one and ignored the real one.

Concerned by this, Saddam's advisers suggested they have a mustache-measuring contest, and the one who was wearing real hair on his lip would be declared the leader.

Both men showed up on the platform, and Iraqi barbers took the measurement. The real Saddam won by a hair, and the people burned the false Saddam in effigy.

The question arises, if all the men in Iraq look like Saddam, how do we know off our Saddam?

It's as if everyone in World War II in Germany looked like Adolf Hitler and everyone in Japan looked like Emperor Hirohito.

It is still a secret, but the air force is now developing a smart bomb that can tell the difference between a real Saddam Hussein and a false one. It is heat-seeking and explodes when the real dictator is lying.

Nobody knows when it will be ready, but intelligence forces are well aware that there is no sense bombing and hell out of Iraq as long as the real Saddam keeps walking around free and the ersatzones are hiding in the bunkers.

The United States is impatient to find a Saddam who must be punished. We're tired of taking on a bunch of disguised Iraqi wimps who do nothing but lie to the United Nations.

Even the White House is asking, 'How can you make love — not war — when everyone in a country has the same barber?'

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OPINION Not Anwar but Mahathir

Abu Imran

It is really strange that in many countries, particularly in the under-developed and developing ones, when leaders are thrown out of power, either rightly or wrongly, such leaders, in the place of a generally targetted to be humiliated on charges by the people in power ignoring their own lapses.

For instance, when Benazir Bhutto was put out of power, then immediately charges were formed against her. When Gen. Ershad left power, he came under the wrath of his successor and faced charges. When Begum Khaleda Zia left power, she also had to track to an extent, the same track. And Anwar Ibrahim, the former Dy Prime Minister of Malaysia was no exception. He is now being charged for moral turpitude which prima facie is not tenable. If some one is to be tried for moral turpitude, it is not Anwar but Dr Mahathir first because he has created the ground for the people at individual and collective level to go the way.

A head of state/government of Muslim country is supposed to cause good and word-off evils within the Islamic meaning and decide affairs according to the dictates of Allah and His prophet (PBUH).

Further, if Anwar was that bad then where Dr Mahathir was during the last around two decades? Why he did not take him to task earlier? Had he done so, it would have been good for all. But now following political rift, there is every possibility that Anwar Ibrahim is being victimised. And therefore in all fairness, justice demands that not he (Anwar) but Dr Mahathir should be accountable first.